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"CAN IT BE POSSIBLE THAT OSMAN, THE OUTLAW, IS IN THAT BALLOON?"

Silver Star, THE BOY KNIGHT. A PRAIRIE ROMANCE.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "ANTELOPE ABE,"
"KEEN-KNIFE," "LASSO JACK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DOWN FROM THE CLOUDS.

A FULL moon shone through the blue depths of an October night upon the great prairies—the dark woods and winding rivers of the great Far West.

A soft, balmy wind drifted lazily from the south, laden with the rich, ripe fragrance of autumn.

The voices of the night were low and monotonous. The White Earth river rolled along as if rendered sluggish by the influence of surrounding nature. Or that weird, mysterious spirit of an Indian summer night seemed to have thrown its dream-like pose over the land.

But, as the hours of night wore, the slumbering echoes of the woods were suddenly awakened by the sound of hooved feet galloping down its darkened halls. It came from the direction of the White Earth, and appeared to be moving southward toward the great, boundless prairie.

A pair of deer on the edge of the plain, hearing the sound, stopped in their trail and pricked up their ears in alarm, for clear and distinct sounded the clattering hoofs approaching along the path they were following.

A moment later the animals sniffed the air with quivering nostrils, and turning, fled away over the plain into the purple haze of night.

Then forth from the dense shadows of the night—along the deer trail—galloped a horseman.

Upon the margin of the plain he drew rein under the mellow light of the old moon.

The figure of the horseman was that of a man—a youth in age but a man in physical development, and of experience in the saddle, with the revolver, and upon the trail. From under the rim of his gray, slouched hat a brown, beardless face looked out—marked with all the impetuosity of a young and daring spirit, and set with a pair of as bright, hawk-like eyes as ever shot their keen glances over the plains of Dakota.

He was dressed in a finely-wrought suit of buckskin that fitted him neatly, displaying his manly figure to good advantage. A rifle was slung at his back, and upon either hip hung a silver-mounted revolver. But the most conspicuous feature of all, was the great silver star upon his breast—a star that was as well known to every savage and prairie freebooter in Dakota and the Black Hills as old Ursa Major is known to the students of astronomy.

For the horseman was the noted Silver Star, the Boy Knight of the Prairies.

He was mounted upon a small, clean-limbed gray horse, whose long, slender neck, small head and wide nostrils denoted wonderful speed and endless endurance. The animal was caparisoned with a light, strong saddle, and bridle to correspond. At the pommel of the saddle hung a leather-covered canteen and a rope lariat.

As he came to a halt upon the plain the young man dropped the rein upon his animal's neck, and resting his arm upon the cantle of his saddle, assumed an attitude of intense listening. At the same time his keen eyes searched the plain before and upon each side of him, closely, carefully.

"Surely I can't be mistaken as to the point," he mused; and then he took from his pocket a slip of paper, and read these words—written in a bold, rude hand:

"SILVER STAR:—Paul Osman, the Outlaw, has some devilry afoot—the particulars I don't know. But if you are in the vicinity of the point where the Big Deer Trail enters the White Earth woods, you may learn the facts. Go if you can; that villain must be thwarted."
THE HIDDEN SPY."

When he had concluded this note, which he had found pinned to his blanket one morning upon awakening from a sound slumber in the woods, he glanced around him as if to take in his position, then continued:

"Well, this is the place; but the question is whether I've been duped, or led into a trap. I've heard of the Hidden Spy and the Mysterious Spy for some time, but I always believed he was a myth; nor does this note weaken my views of the case. I'm inclined to think that the Mysterious Spy and the Demon of Darkness, of which we hear so much, but never see, are creations of some dull, superstitious minds. At any rate, I shall consider the Spy a genuine fraud, if this trip down here terminates in a water-haul."

Thus for several minutes he mused to himself, and finally, satisfied that he had come there upon a wild-goose chase he took up the reins and spoke to his horse. But to his surprise, the animal refused to obey. It shook its head, reared slightly and gave a low, uneasy whinny not to be mistaken by his young master.

"Shades of the temple!" exclaimed the boy. "What's in the wind, Prince, my good horse? Can it be possible that Osman, the Outlaw, and his gang are near?"

As if in answer to his questions, the horse shook his head, snorted repeatedly, and pawed the earth violently.

"What in the name of conscience can ail you, Prince? Are you going mad? I never saw you act so before," said the Boy Knight; and with his revol-

ver in his hand he leaned forward and searched the grass before him. But he saw nothing, and quieting his animal, he listened. Nothing, however, save the beating of his own heart, seemed to disturb the quietude of the night.

A moment or two passed when the horse again became fretful and uneasy. Then a shadow crossed the youth's vision, and lifting his eyes to the object that had come between him and the moon, a cry of horror burst from his lips, and he involuntarily drew up on the reins until his horse was nearly thrown upon its haunches.

Between him and the moon hung—in mid-air—what?

Never in all his young life had Silver Star known fear. Never had he shrunk from danger or duty, however great, however arduous. He was not superstitious, as most bordermen are, but it must be confessed that the youth now found himself confronted by an object that, altogether, was beyond his comprehension—that filled his breast with a strange, mysterious feeling—a feeling of commingled awe and fear. He fixed his eyes upon the object and held them there as if riveted by a horrible fascination. His horse, too, stood silent—trembling in every limb with affright.

High above the horizon swung the great object. In shape and size it resembled a large haystack, top downward. It was moving, and reeling against the sky like a drunken thing, and appeared to be gradually settling toward the earth. Something like a great basket was suspended from its base, and in this basket the Boy Knight could see the forms of two men dimly outlined against the blue sky. And, furthermore, he could hear the voices of these men engaged in conversation—engaged in loud and emphatic tones, that, to all appearances, were those of animosity and resentment.

Silver Star was somewhat relieved of his wonderment when he heard the voices of these sky travelers. He had never seen a balloon, but had often heard of it, and now came to the rightful conclusion that the object before him was a balloon settling to earth. It relieved him of all fears and doubts, and turning his horse, he rode back into the shadows that lay along the edge of the woods.

"By the shades of the temple," the horseman mused, "I wonder, now, if there isn't something in the words of the Hidden Spy? Can it be possible that Osman, the Outlaw, is in that balloon? or is he lurking about the 'Deer Trail' to meet them balloon fellows here, by appointment?"

The balloon was, by this time, about a hundred yards above him. It seemed to have become almost stationary, and stood trembling and quivering in the air as if equally balanced between the laws of gravitation and the buoyant effort of the inflated canvas—unable to descend, unable to rise. Meanwhile, Silver Star could still hear the aeronauts engaged in high words that sounded more clearly to his ears than if they had emanated from a lower point; still, he was unable to make out anything intelligible. However, as the balloon drifted slowly along the edge of the woods above the tree-tops, he rode almost directly under it, but carefully concealed in the shadows. The words of the aeronauts became somewhat plainer, and he finally gathered enough to learn that they were disputing about throwing something overboard to lighten their craft and prevent it from falling to the earth.

"I don't care a —, professor," he heard one of them say; "if this balloon is lightened of one thing, it will be lightened of me, also."

"Man," replied he who was addressed as professor, "don't you know that if we go down here we can never rise again?"

"I don't care a spark of fire in purgatory!" was the response; "you've heard my decision."

To this the professor laughed a wild, sardonic laugh.

A conversation in a lower tone now followed, and a few moments later Silver Star saw, to his surprise and wonder, a dark, elongated object lifted over the basket of the balloon and lowered by means of a rope. When it had reached the ground, the rope was dropped, notwithstanding the sharp protest of one of the aeronauts; and thus relieved of a portion of its burden, the balloon began slowly to ascend.

Now again did the Boy Knight hear high words between the aeronauts, with not an infrequent use of frightful oaths. But the balloon was soon rising so rapidly that he could no longer distinguish their words. He kept his eyes upon the air-ship, however, and was startled to see the men moving quickly about in the basket, and making motions with their arms as if engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. This had lasted but a few moments when, to the horror of the lad, he saw one of the men lift the other in his arms and hurl him out of the basket. Down, down, with a wild, blood-curdling scream trailing through the air, the doomed man sunk, and struck the earth with a dull, crushing thud.

"Oh, my God!" burst from the lips of the boy, his soul fairly sickening at the horrible sight and sound; "what awful mystery and murder are these?"

He glanced up as if to see what next was to follow, but the balloon, now relieved of more of its burden, soared into the blue depths above, and striking an upper current of air, drifted rapidly away to the northward.

Without a moment's hesitation Silver Star dismounted, and, leaving his horse to follow, advanced to where the ill-fated aeronaut lay. He found the man—an entire stranger of about thirty years—lying in a broken, bleeding lump. Life was already extinct, and the young borderman was about to begin an examination of his person for documentary evidence of his identity, and from whence he had come, when a low, stifled moan hard by arrested his attention. This reminded him of the first object

that had been lowered from the balloon, and turning, he walked to where it had been let down. To his surprise and astonishment, he found it to be a human form wrapped in a gray blanket, and struggling to free itself from the folds of the blanket, and the rope that encircled the body.

Without a moment's hesitation Silver Star drew his knife, and severing the rope, stripped the blanket from the form and face of the unknown.

"Holy Jerusalem!" burst involuntarily from the lad's lips, while his face and eyes lit up with a glow of surprise and admiration.

And no wonder, for before him, now occupying a sitting posture, was a girl scarcely past sixteen summers—a girl of wondrous beauty—a beauty heightened by her wild surroundings, and the weird, mellow beams of the old white moon.

CHAPTER II.

ELWE —.

It was a strange, touching scene—hard for the pen to describe, for pencil to portray. The long, dark line of forest—the great brown prairie—the astounded young Knight of the Plain—the beautiful, terrified girl—the lifeless lump of humanity lying near—the motionless horse of the ranger—the tall, waving grass, and the whole flooded by the pale light of the moon struggling through the mist of autumn, formed a combination of elements whose expression and spirit could not be translated to the canvas of the painter.

For several moments not a soul stirred. The pale lips of the maiden were parted, and her soulful eyes lifted to the handsome face of Silver Star as though she would speak; but, like the youth himself, she seemed speechless, spellbound.

The spell was suddenly broken by Prince, who gave an uneasy snort, and struck the ground sharply with his hoof.

Silver Star glanced quickly around him, and then turning again to the maiden said:

"I can't actually believe my senses."

The maiden glanced around her, as though his voice came from some other direction; still she spoke never a word.

"Are you actually human?—flesh and blood?" the youth continued, advancing and laying his finger upon her head as if to assure himself that she was a material object and not a vision.

The touch of the boy's finger seemed to break the spell that bound her motionless and silent, and by an effort she arose to her feet, though still gazing in bewilderment about her.

In size she was a little below the medium, but possessed a *petite*, well-rounded form, a sweet, girlish face set in a wealth of golden hair, and large brown eyes with long silken lashes. She was dressed in garments that were not of the border, but of wealth and civilization. The shawl about her shoulders, the jewels upon her person, and the air of refinement upon her features told that she was a child of wealth and society.

"Where am I?" were the first words she spoke, after running her eyes over the boundless plain before her.

"My dear young lady," said the Boy Knight, gallantly, "you are in the southern extremity of Dakota Territory."

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, with a start; "this cannot be."

"It is a fact, miss, howsoever bitter it may be to you. Pardon me, but may I ask where you live?"

"A thousand miles from here, I expect!" she said, half-choked with some terrible inward emotion.

"But, oh! this cannot be true! I am surely dreaming! Tell me if this is not all a frightful dream?"

"I wish I could, miss, and tell you the truth; but it's all too real," replied the boy.

"Oh, merciful heavens!" she cried, wringing her little hands in bitter anguish of heart; "why did I ever live to see this? Oh, sir! how came I here?"

Silver Star was greatly astonished by these questions. He saw that the maiden had been the victim of some foul and devilish conspiracy—that she had been kidnapped and carried from her home, wherever that might be, in the balloon, and that, too, while under the influence of some drug.

"All I know about you, miss, is that you were lowered from a balloon a few minutes ago—that the balloon rose in the air and sailed away to the northward, leaving you alone to the protection of Heaven in this wild, heathenish land. But, rest assured, I'll die before I see any harm come to you. I'm Silver Star, the Boy Knight. I b'long up to the fort, and there I'll take you. If I do say it myself, Miss Stranger, I'm young, but blest if I can't square accounts with any red-skin or prairie freebooter that'll dare to offer you harm by word or act. And I'm rough, too, as a quartz-rock, but then you will excuse me, I know, for I haven't had the society and school-polishing like I know you've had, miss. We fellows out here are full of fight and fun, but not much for nice clothes and big words; but if there is anything I like to see it's a fair fight and a pretty woman. I know you've not been treated right, Miss Stranger; them men must 'a' been awful demons to leave you, a perfect angel, alone on this prairie for the wolves to eat you up."

"No doubt that is what they desired—intended," the girl responded, half-choked with her emotions.

"But their game's failed them, thank Heaven! Now may I ask you what your name is, miss? and where you come from? and who them men are? and what they are to you?"

"My name is Elwe—" she began, but the rest of the name was lost to the ears of Silver Star in the loud, shrill whinny of his horse.

"Great shades of the temple! what's coming now, Prince?" the lad exclaimed, and, turning, he saw his horse looking southward over the plain. Then the

louth bent his head and listened, but could hear nothing. He dropped himself to the earth, and pressing his ear to the ground, again listened. In a moment he started up, saying:

"Horsemen are comin', Miss Elwe. We must leave here, for I know 'most they're Ingins or robbers. I've been down here watchin' for some devilry, and I guess I've seen it. The words of 'The Hidden Spy' are comin' true—but then that's not the thing to talk to you about. Miss Elwe, can you ride horseback?"

"Yes, sir," the maiden replied, a faint smile playing about her lips; "if there is any thing I excel in, it is in riding; but, Silver Star—"

"Well, then, you must mount my horse, and I'll walk, for we must be moving from here."

"Oh, sir, I could not think of taking your horse from you," the girl replied.

"But you must think of it; as for me, I could walk a hundred miles to let any one like you ride."

"You are gallant, I must confess; but—"

"I will listen to nothing," the boy interrupted; "you must ride my nag, and I'll walk."

He called his horse up, and assisted the maiden to the animal's back. She took her seat in the saddle with an ease and grace which proved that she was accustomed to it, and gathering up the reins she announced her readiness for departure.

Silver Star led the way toward the White Earth, but before he had gone far in that direction, strange cries were heard emanating from the depths of the woods, and were answered up and down the river. Full well the young guide knew what they meant, and without a word he turned abruptly to the right and led the way eastward over the plain. He walked briskly, and had the maiden been fully aware of the real danger that menaced them she would doubtless have noticed the uneasiness of her rescuer. But, all unconscious of the fact that hostile Indians and white robbers infested the woods and prowled over the prairies, she rode on, brooding over her sorrow, and wondering, until it seemed her very heart would burst, who her abductors were, why they had carried her away from her home and friends, and whether she would ever return to them or not. In fact, her brain grew dizzy, and there were times when she seemed floating along in a half-wakeful sleep—half-conscious and half-dreaming. Often she tried to convince herself that she was dreaming, that she might wake to a pleasant realization; but the "swish" of her horse's feet, the moving form of the gallant young knight, the great expanse of prairie, and the moon in the blue depths of heaven—all convinced her of the painful reality of her situation.

They had journeyed some three or four miles, and the maiden had succeeded, to some extent, in reconciling herself to the situation, when suddenly her guide dropped alongside her horse and looking up into her face said, with a troubled expression upon his countenance:

"Elwe, you will have to leave me and ride on alone."

"Why, Silver Star, I am content to follow you," she said, innocent of the boy's meaning; "moreover, I would not know where to go."

"But you must go, Elwe—I insist upon it."

"Why, Silver Star?" she asked.

"We are bein' pursued."

"Being pursued?" she exclaimed; "by whom?"

"Indians, or outlaws; or both, Elwe. Look back; do you see that dark line and flashing weapons moving yonder?"

Elwe glanced back and saw—not over a hundred rods distant—a number of horsemen riding furiously toward them. She could hear the sound of their horses' feet, now that her attention had been called to them, and see the flash and glimmer of their weapons and trappings in the moonlight. Still the maiden scarcely realized the magnitude of her danger, and Silver Star noticed the fact.

"Elwe," he said, persistently, "you must fly! It will be death to fall into them savages' power. They are hostile Sioux, no doubt, led by the renegade chief, White Crane."

"But, Silver Star, will they not kill you?" the girl inquired, with trembling lips.

"Never mind me—I'll take care of myself. Give Prince the rein, Elwe, and let him go. I assure you he will carry you safely through to the fort. Do not attempt to guide him, for he knows the way even better than I do. Now go, Elwe, and may Heaven protect you! Not a moment must be lost."

Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, Elwe bid the boy farewell, gave her horse the rein and galloped swiftly away.

A wild, savage yell behind told that her flight had been discovered, and then pursuit began in earnest.

Silver Star dropped himself in the grass, which was nearly waist-deep, and upon hands and knees began crawling cautiously but rapidly away to get out of the path of the savages. He felt satisfied that they had not seen him, and the only fears he entertained were of being trampled to death. But these were soon disposed of, for he had scarcely gone a dozen rods ere the whole band of Indians and robbers swept past him like the wind. Lying upon the earth, he could see every man—red and white—and as near as he could judge they were about fifty in number.

When far past him the young guide rose to his feet, and, as a smile passed over his face, he said:

"Go on, you yellin' horde of purgatorial blisters! I'll risk you overtakein' Prince and Elwe. Ah! who knows but this is a part of the night's programme of which 'The Hidden Spy' spoke in his note? Bless if I don't believe there is such a person as the 'Invisible Spy' and the Demon of Darkness! But that girl! she's the darlinest—but, bah! what am I 'bout? The best thing for me is to be peg-

ging out for the fort. A thirty-mile walk is not encouraging; but by cutting across by way of the Dead Fall I can save five miles, and believe I'll do it. I've passed the fall more than once, and can do it again if it is a little risky; so here goes."

He turned north and struck out across the prairie. To him every acre of prairie, every watercourse, wood, trail, hill and chasm within miles of him was perfectly familiar. Wherever he went there was some known landmark to guide him, and so he was not compelled to follow any beaten track or road. He reached the woods and plunged into the deep, dense shadows; here he observed more caution—more thorough force of habit than fear of danger. Pressing on he soon entered the broken, wooded foot-hills where treacherous foot-falls, valleys rent with chasms, and rugged, precipitous bluffs beset his path. The timber, however, was not so dense, and the moonlight struggling to earth, here and there, greatly relieved the footsteps of the young adventurer.

He had journeyed several miles when he found himself confronted by an almost perpendicular cliff, or bluff, extending miles to the right and left. By passing around the western extremity of this bluff he could save miles of travel in his journey to the fort; but it would be attended with great and imminent peril. Nothing daunted, however, Silver Star pressed forward—taking the shortest and most dangerous route. He kept close in against the face of the bluff upon a ledge of rocks that wound around the great cliff like a spiral stairway, and soon the greatest danger appeared. A deep, black chasm set in upon his left, while the bluff rose higher and higher, overhanging the narrow way he was following. But Silver Star knew his course and all its attending dangers. He had traveled it before, but none save the nimble-footed and the cool-headed dare attempt the passage of a certain point on the route known as the Dead Fall. It was a place where the traveler had to turn a sharp corner of rocks—where the footing was treacherous, and where many a red-skin and hunter had been hurled into the fearful abyss below, a broken, bleeding, torn mass. It was this point the boy dreaded, for every step was attended with danger. A misstep or a loose pebble might hurl him to his death. One thing was in his favor. The moon shone full against the face of the cliff and lighted his way. But for this he would have had to pick his way step by step.

As he advanced, the boy found that his path grew narrower, and at times slanted off toward the precipice on his left. Every step now had to be planted with the greatest care until beyond the Dead Fall, which was but a few rods away, and the young man had almost reached it when the sound of voices fell upon his ears.

He paused and listened, to be certain. He was not mistaken. From beyond the Dead Fall came the sound. Some one was coming toward him from the other direction—from around the Dead Fall. It was impossible for two persons to pass upon the ledge, and if those coming should happen to be enemies, death would be inevitable.

The lad held his breath in suspense. He leaned against the cliff, for he felt sick at heart. He fixed his eyes upon the angle that concealed the unknown from his sight. A form turned the Dead Fall and paused before him. It was that of an Indian—an Indian chief—a tall, ungainly looking creature—hideous and grotesque with feathers and war-paint. Silver Star recognized him as the notorious renegade, Wade-in-the-Water, or White Crane.

The chief readily recognized the boy by the star upon his breast. It flashed before him like the eye of doom.

Each was thunderstruck by the presence of the other.

They stood leaning slightly forward, glaring into each other's eyes like tigers resting in their death-struggle.

Cold and damp came the air from the black depths below into their faces.

The cold sweat started in great drops upon the face of the chief, and his nerves jerked and twitched with emotion.

The star upon the breast of the boy flashed and glimmered in the moonlight.

The very wall against which they stood pressed seemed to be swelling outright as if to crowd them over the dizzy heights.

Voices beyond the Dead Fall told that the chief had friends soon to turn the corner in sight.

Slowly the left hand of the boy sought the pistol at his hip. Nor was the movement unobserved by the chief whose lips moved, and in a strange mysterious voice, purely English, articulated these words.

"Boy—Silver Star, retreat! Go, before they see you, or it will be too late. I'll hold them beyond the corner until you are out of sight. Go. S'death!"

The voice impressed the boy strangely. He knew it was that of a white man in disguise—a man who, to save himself, was willing to permit the boy—the dreaded Silver Star—to escape, and that, too, when a great bounty was upon his young scalp!

Silver Star knew there was no use arguing with the chief; but accepting his proposition, and making the same known by a nod of his head, he at once began retreating backward, all the while keeping his eyes upon the movements of the Indian for fear of treachery. He soon passed from view of his enemy around the winding ledge, and then he turned his back upon the chief and continued on. Thoughts of the fair Elwe came up in his mind, notwithstanding his dangerous situation; and a pang of bitter regret and disappointment smote his breast when it occurred to him that his retreat would delay him almost a day in his journey to the fort, where he hoped to again meet the maiden.

A little further on a niche in the side of the cliff arrested the youth's attention and invited him to a daring adventure.

It was deep enough to conceal his person, and as the moonlight did not relieve it of its darkness on account of the overhanging brow of the cliff, he resolved to press himself into it and run the risk of discovery by the passing red-skins.

Removing the star upon his breast, the lad backed himself into the niche, and in breathless suspense awaited the coming and going, of White Crane and his followers. He had not long to wait, for the ungainly chief soon passed him with long, sliding footsteps, his elbows almost brushing the boy's breast as he passed. He was immediately followed by a savage in paint and feathers, and this one was followed by another and still another, until a dozen or more had passed without discovering the enemy pressed in the niche of the wall so close that he seemed a part of it.

The lad remained perfectly quiet for fear all had not gone by.

Five minutes passed, but as no more savages appeared to be coming, he leaned forward and looked out along the ledge.

A cry escaped his lips and he started back, clutching his revolver, for another savage was coming along the ledge within five steps of him! That the warrior had discovered his presence there was no denying, for he sent forth a yell that started a hundred echoes, leaping and rebounding through the hills and valleys.

It was immediately answered by those that had passed by, and a few moments later the Boy Knight heard them coming back, and heard the savage on the right making known his discovery to them.

This placed the daring boy in a perilous situation from which there seemed no possible chance of escape. It is true, the angles of the rocks on each side of him, protected his body as long as he remained wedged in there; but he could not entertain any assurance of escape.

The chasm before him was over two hundred feet deep, the rocks behind high and projecting; so there was no mode of escape save by the path that led him there; so, drawing his revolver, he prepared for the worst. He had some advantage of position, but the enemy had the advantage of numbers. Moreover, Silver Star was under the necessity of keeping a watch upon the right and left, for fear the savages might undertake to circumvent him by closing in on both sides at the same time.

With a revolver in each hand, he kept unceasing watch. The minutes wore slowly and heavily away into hours, but to the watcher's surprise the foe made not the slightest demonstration. The savage remained perfectly quiet in hopes of deluding the boy; but Silver Star knew with whom he had to deal, and that the enemy was possessed of dogged patience.

Slowly the moon crept around the bluff and went down, leaving the land in a purple gloom, and rendering the situation of the brave Silver Star more precarious. But slowly the eventful night wore away, and the light of a new day burst over hill and valley. It gave a momentary relief to the besieged youth's mind; yet it did not bring relief to his body. Hunger and cramp from long confinement were telling upon him.

Still nothing had been heard or seen of the red-skins. Where were they?

To test the matter, the lad put his hat upon the muzzle of his revolver, and pushed it slowly out past the angle of his retreat. Scarcely was half of the crown exposed ere a bullet tore through it, and the crack of a rifle woke the morning echoes. Silver Star, equal to the emergency, uttered a groan of distress, and the enemy, believing he was killed, uttered a wild, triumphant yell, and then the one on the left—he who had fired the shot—glided forward to secure the coveted scalp. But as he appeared around the corner, a pistol flashed in his very face, and a bullet crashed through his brain. A low moan escaped the doomed warrior's lips; he clutched nervously at space, reeled and tottered, and then sunk backward and disappeared over the edge of the cliff.

This gave the red-skins to understand that their young foe was wide awake, and ready for any emergency. It also gave them to understand that he could not be dislodged by force.

The morning sun rose above the hills and tree-tops, and shot his cheerful rays into the narrow retreat of the Boy Knight. Still it brought little relief—little hope to his breast. How and when his imprisonment would end, God only knew; but, accustomed to look upon the bright side of life, the youth braced himself, inhaled the fresh air into his lungs, and worked his limbs until partially relieved of their cramp.

The mouth of the gaping chasm was not five feet from where he stood. It was not over a hundred feet wide, and the top of the opposite bluff just reached to a level with Silver Star's eyes. It was crowned with a dense growth of scrubby trees and undergrowth, and while the boy was pondering over his situation, and wondering what the next probable movement of the enemy might be, it suddenly occurred to him that it would be a very easy matter for a red-skin to come up on the opposite side of the chasm and shoot him down as he stood exposed in the niche. And the very thought seemed to have been born of intuition—forced upon him by that instinctive magnetism with which man and beast have been endowed; for scarcely had it entered his mind ere he saw the bushes on the opposite side of the chasm part, and a savage face appear in the opening.

It was the face of the renegade chief, White

Crane; and as he looked across the abyss into the very face of the brave young scout, a smile of demonic triumph seemed to contort his face into that of a gloating demon.

Silver Star stood in full view of the chief, whose presence on the opposite side of the bluff he knew, of course, must be known to his braves on the ledge; and yet the chief acted as though he was endeavoring to keep himself concealed from the eyes of all but the boy. He probably felt a pang of guilt in taking this advantage of a boy; but, be this as it may, Silver Star was tempted to try a shot upon the renegade, and yet he did not. But a moment later he saw the chief thrust his gun through a little opening in the shrubbery and level it upon him. He saw the eye of the man blazing down the deadly barrel like the eye of doom, and bowing his head—with the word "Elwe" upon his lips—the brave young knight awaited his fate.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF ONE DANGER INTO ANOTHER.

The rifle of the renegade chief rung forth, a groan followed, and a limp and lifeless body went bounding headlong into the awful depths of the Dead Falls. But it was not the body of Silver Star, the Boy Knight. It was that of a savage—the one that had stood so patiently at the right of the niche in which the boy was concealed.

Silver Star stood unharmed, though he scarcely knew what to think—whether the figures passing around him were the figures of a wild dream, or of stern reality. He thought it impossible for White Crane to have slain one of his own warriors purposefully; and yet it seemed as utterly impossible for him to have killed him by mistake. Surely he—the boy—had not been mistaken in the person he had seen across the chasm? He was satisfied it was White Crane, but what puzzled him was the chief's action in shooting one of his followers; and while pondering the matter over, he was suddenly startled by another rifle-report, and the death-yell of another savage.

Again had the supposed renegade chief slain another warrior, and again was the Boy Knight plunged into doubt and suspense that were painful. He could see nothing of the chief now, nor could he hear anything of his red enemies on the ledge to the left; still he was afraid to venture from his covert, and while trying to determine what course to pursue, he was suddenly surprised by seeing his unknown friend emerge from the shrubbery on the opposite side of the chasm in full view.

It was the renegade chief, White Crane, sure enough! "Great horn—I mean waugh!" the chief began, in a quick, excited tone; "what in the fire and thunder are you doing in that hole, Silver Star! Didn't I give you a chance, last night, when I met you on the edge, to save your bacon? Oh, if I had a-holt of you I'd jerk some of that adventuresome young cussedness outen your system! Why, I had to plug two of my braves to skeer the rest away, and so, if you know what's good for your hide, you want to be a-climbin' out of thar like a sick b'ar. In ten minutes more my braves 'll be round here lookin' for the feller that struck Billy Patterson. Now shin out round the Dead Fall."

"White Crane, why have you befriended me, thus?" the boy ventured to demand, full of strange eagerness.

"That's none of your business, my larkie, and now good-by, for I'm off like a gazelle," and the strange chief glided into the bushes and was seen no more by Silver Star.

The boy had been deeply imbued with the honest intention of the chief, notwithstanding his mysterious motive; and so he ventured from his covert.

He found the Indians gone, and without a moment's hesitation he moved along the ledge, around the Dead Fall, and made his way from the cliff onto broader and safer ground. He now breathed an air of relief, and gained a moment for reflection. His mind reverted to Elwe and the mysterious White Crane. He at once relieved himself of all fears concerning the maiden, for he felt certain his noble horse would carry her beyond danger; but the more he thought of the chief, and his acts of mercy to him, the greater became his heartfelt gratitude and wonder—wonder that deepened into a profound mystery.

Long, weary miles now lay before the Boy Knight. They were all the more weary for he was suffering the pangs of hunger and the ill-effect of his long and painful confinement on the ledge; but, with that firm, unflinching courage and resolute determination so characteristic of the boy, he pushed boldly forward. He soon reached the White Earth, and turning westward followed along that stream, looking for a crossing. He had followed this route but a short distance when he came upon the smoldering embers of a camp-fire. He knew by the signs that a party of Indians had been encamped there during the night.

Stirring up the embers he put on some dry fuel, and with his hat fanned the fire into a blaze. This done, he resolved to have some breakfast, and shouldering his rifle he set off in search of game. He concluded to kill anything fit to eat, from a deer to a bird, and, as luck would have it, he had not gone far when a fine deer came lancing down the woodland shadows within fifty paces of him. Accustomed to firing at deer and antelope upon the run, the lad quickly brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The deer lunged forward a few rods and fell in a little opening.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the lad, as the echoes repeated the report of his rifle over and over and sent it rolling and rebounding through the young day, "that's noise enough to bring down the Ingins from

British America. But then I can't starve, report or no report."

Reloading his rifle he advanced to secure a slice of the deer. The animal was still struggling in its death-throes. It was a noble buck with a coat as sleek and glossy as silk, and as the young knight stood waiting for it to die, he was startled by sight of the animal's hot blood spurting from two wounds in its side. Two bullets had pierced the deer, and Silver Star had fired but one of them! The other one must have been fired simultaneously—both rifles cracked as one. Who had fired that other shot?

As Silver Star asked himself the question he raised his eyes and glanced quickly around him. A cry burst from his lips.

Forth from the bushes near he saw a painted savage leap, and glide toward him with drawn tomahawk.

Quicker than a flash of lightning Silver Star whipped out a revolver and fired. The savage stopped suddenly, clutched at his face and attempted to utter a cry, but the blood that welled up in his throat choked down all utterance save a low, strangling gasp, and reeling he fell dead. But, scarcely was this victory won ere two more warriors came bounding from the woods with a frightful yell, and bore down upon the young white. Never flinching, the boy deliberately raised his revolver and fired, bringing down his Indian, and was about to repeat the act upon the other, when he—the warrior—threw his hatchet at the youth. Silver Star dodged the flying weapon, but in throwing up his hand to ward off danger, the tomahawk struck his revolver and knocked it from his hand.

Still the savage came on, drawing his knife as he advanced, and yelling like a demon.

Silver Star, ever ready for any emergency, stood erect with one foot set forward, his fists clenched, his teeth set and his eyes blazing with a desperate resolve. He had laid his rifle down when he drew his pistol, and now he stood weaponless; still he yielded not an inch.

The savage was a herculean fellow—strong enough to crush the boy by main strength. The ferocity of a demon was depicted upon his face. He felt confident of an easy victory, for he saw that the lad was without any means of defense whatever.

Silver Star, however, had resolved to sell his life dearly, and, when the savage was within ten feet of him, he sprang forward like a young tiger and threw himself prostrate upon the earth. His head passed between the legs of the warrior, but the feet of the savage striking the shoulder of the boy he stumbled and fell full length upon the ground.

Both, with lightning quickness endeavored to be first upon his feet; but the first down was the first up, and before the red-skin was aware of the fact, the hands of Silver Star were fastened upon his scalp-lock, and he felt himself jerked backward with dreadful violence across the body of the dying deer. Silver Star fell at the same time, and the Indian feeling the moving body under him, supposed, in his blind fury, that he had fallen upon the body of the boy, and raising his knife he drove the blade, with all his strength, into the animal's neck. He attempted to withdraw the weapon, but as it had been buried in the muscles and tendons it seemed riveted there and refused to be withdrawn, and before he could repeat his effort Silver Star was upon foot and tugging desperately at his long scalp. By a sudden movement the lad succeeded in jerking him beyond the reach of his knife, when the warrior was thrown upon his natural resources for defense. Like a huge serpent he whipped himself about upon the earth and fairly frothed at the mouth. His strength was prodigious, and by a quick jerk he threw the Boy Knight to his knees, and reaching backward he seized the youth by the collar and drew him up close against his back. In the iron gripe of the monster the lad was as a mere infant, and he was completely at the villain's mercy. Still the young knight held on to his scalp-lock, and kept the great bullock-like head of the savage drawn back so that he could not exert his entire strength.

In the struggle they had rolled over a rod from the body of the deer, but now the savage began wriggling and edging back toward the deer. Silver Star knew his intention; it was to secure his knife and end the struggle.

The young knight felt that his life was in imminent peril, for he was powerless to do aught in the hands of the giant.

Inch by inch did the red-skin work his way toward the deer, and at length he came close enough to touch the haft of his knife with his fingers. Another hitch and he could grasp it.

Silver Star felt his blood run cold. He glanced across the opening and within the shadows of a tree he saw a strange, round, black object, resembling, in some respects, the wings of a monster bat. The sight of it sent a shiver through his frame, notwithstanding his perilous situation. Before he had time for a second thought he felt the savage hitch forward; he saw his fingers close upon the handle of the knife.

At this very juncture a cloud of smoke burst from the dark object on the edge of the opening, and the dull, pistol-like report of a firearm broke the dead silence of the moment. Silver Star felt a quiver run through the frame of his giant antagonist, he felt his gripe loosen upon his collar, and looking into his painted face, he saw a bullet-hole directly between his eyes—saw that he had been slain.

The next instant the Boy Knight stood, a free lad; but who had saved him? He glanced toward the edge of the opening; but that strange, black object had disappeared.

While the youth again found himself pondering over another strange mystery, he was suddenly

startled by sight of a wild, tragic scene that was being enacted a few rods away.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK, THEN COMES THE WHOOP OF WAR."

SILVER STAR'S attention had been attracted by the sound of a human voice, and looking around he saw a white man, about ten rods away, in a position of the most comical and ridiculous character; and the words that he heard issuing from the man's lips filled him with no little wonder and curiosity.

The man was dressed from head to foot in the garb of a frontiersman, and was standing facing, and close up against a tree with his arms hugging the trunk tightly. And what was more strange, the arms of another man—evidently a savage—upon the other side of the tree were lapped around the trunk, and the fingers of the hand clutched tightly in the unkempt locks of the hunter.

What it all meant, Silver Star could not understand, and for a minute or more he stood gazing upon the strange performance. To his surprise, he discovered that the Indian was none other than his friendly foe, White Crane, in whose hair the long digits of the hunter were hooked.

The two foes had evidently approached each other with the tree between them, and aware of each other's presence on the opposite side, had endeavored to seize each other and thus became fastened in a deadly gripe, and in this ludicrous manner they were found by the Boy Knight.

It appeared that neither would relinquish his hold through fear that his antagonist would gain an advantage over him; and yet they were in a position that would enable them to inflict little damage upon each other.

Around and around the tree they circled, jerking and thumping each other's head against the tree until their faces and foreheads were bruised and bleeding. By turns, they cursed each other's cowardice and stupidity, and made the most horrible threats the human mind could conceive.

Silver Star enjoyed the scene very much, yet in some doubt as to what it really meant, he stood and watched and listened.

"Oh, you gol-infernalated red bastion," he heard the white hunter exclaim, "I'll hold you here till the fires of the sulphur-pit goes out—I'll pound your old cocoa-nut shell ag'in' this tree till the milk in it's all churned into bonnyclabber, confound your ever—oh!"

His words were here cut short by White Crane giving his head a furious bump against the tree.

"Waugh!" vociferated the red-skin. "White Crane much big chief—he hold pale-face dog here till tree grows heap big and makes white dog's arms break."

"Oh, that's your idea, is it, you mutton-head? I'll hold onto your hair till my whole carcass is stretched into arms. I'll be found here a hundred years from now if you last, you red bastion. Oh, Jackson, that fit at Waterloo! jist wait and I'll soon kick this tree out from between us; I'm to be your last sickness!"

In this manner they continued to pull, and haul, and curse each other around and around the tree for some time. Neither seemed disposed to yield, and Silver Star finally concluded that he would interfere. He knew not whether the white man was a friend or not; but he naturally supposed he was a friend. White Crane he knew had befriended him—saved his life, and now if he could repay him he was going to do it, and advancing nearer to them he exclaimed:

"Ho, here, men! what means all this?"

Had a bomb-shell exploded near, the two foes would not have started more violently. Each broke his hold upon the other's hair and started back, still keeping the tree between them. Each glanced at the Boy Knight, then drew his knife and stood ready, as if expecting his enemy to come around the tree and finish the conflict. But neither stirred from his tracks—seemed anxious to renew the battle.

"Men, why this fight here in this manner?" Silver Star asked, looking from one to the other.

"Because the pale-face dog is afraid to come 'round the tree and fight like a brave man," answered White Crane.

"The red-faced bastion's a liar," roared the hunter, an odd-looking old genius of the genuine Yankee type; "I went around and around that tree fifty thousand times, but the coward alers kept on the t'other side like a squirrel. Them are the facts and figgers in the case, youngster; and I can whoop that spider-legged, gump-headed red nigger out o' his boots and breeches if he'll jist sail around here!"

"The pale-face is a great coward!" hissed the renegade, shaking his bony fist at his foe, though the tree was still between them.

There was something in the tall, ill-shaped and angular-featured White Crane that impressed Silver Star rather favorably. There was a strange twinkle in his gray eyes, and an odd, serio-comical expression hovering about the great, wide mouth that were indicative of some of the better traits and redeeming qualities of human nature. There was nothing repulsive or suspicious-looking about the white man; but, naturally enough, Silver Star's sympathy was for the man who had saved his life; and believing that now was the time to repay the chief, he resolved to interfere.

"Strangers," he said, "let this conflict end here. You are both white men—brothers. White Crane has saved my life, and it is but jist that I should repay him in like manner. White Crane, you may depart. I will see that no harm befalls you."

"Thanks to thee, my little cove," said the chief, with a graceful wave of the hand, as if glad of the lad's assurance. Then craning his neck around the

tree until he could see the white hunter, shook his fist at him, and then turned and strode majestically, triumphantly away into the woods.

"Great lord of Ballycorn!" exclaimed the hunter, as he saw the chief retreating. "Boy, did you say he actly saved your life?"

"Yes, he did," replied Silver Star, keeping his eyes upon the hunter through fear of treachery.

"Well, then, that saves him! If it weren't for that I'd foller him and exterminate the red-white bastion—I would, by the holy Moses. Boy, it seems awful queer that I didn't knock that tree from atwixt us and abolish him, soul and body. I see, now, I'm a fool for not doing it—I see it plain as the nose on my face, and that's plain enough since it's three times its nateral longi and latitood. Jist look, youngster, whar my proboscis war jerked against that tree by that infernalated red bastion. Oh, that a thought'd do the work, wouldn't I abolish him, though?—wouldn't I smash him all over Dakota like a flint? Oh, save me! I'm mad—mader'n a bum-blebee. But, what's the use frettin'? Come to think, I'll sw'ar I believe that I've heard that cuss's voice before—years ago. If he'd jist shed his paint and dirt, mebbly I'd know him."

"Very likely," answered the boy; "and it seems to me that I ought to know you."

"Well, you'd ought, that's a fact; but as my features are somewhat out of gear, and puffed up so like a blowing adder, I reckon my girl wouldn't know me. But my name is Arkansaw Abe—Old Arkansaw, the Traveler and Scout; that's me, boy."

"Old Arkansaw!" exclaimed the boy, in surprise and delight; "you don't tell me! And yet, I might have guessed as much."

"Yes, sir 'ee, hossfly; I'm that very old pilgrim. No great shakes for beauty, but noted for my sweet disposition and charmin' ways."

"You've been expected at the fort some time," said the Boy Knight.

"Yes; I arriv' thar last night."

"Then you've been to the fort?"

"Yes—oh, yes; and I hadn't been there but a few hours when I was started in search of one of the scouts belongin' to the fort; and the star on your diaphragm tells me I've found him. You, boy, are that little bloody Turk called Silver Star, ar'n't you?"

"I am, Arkansaw; but, why were you sent in search of me? Did Elwe get through safe?"

"Who's Elwe? your hoss? It come through in good time all right side up."

"Without a rider?"

"Without a rider."

Silver Star uttered a groan and fairly staggered under the terrible news.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed; "then Elwe is lost!"

CHAPTER V.

ARKANSAW AND THE BOY KNIGHT MAKE A RECONNOISSANCE.

"Boy," replied Old Arkansaw, "what do you mean by saying Elwe is lost? Who and what is Elwe?"

In a few words as possible the Boy Knight narrated the adventure of the balloon, his rescue of Elwe, and her flight upon his horse.

Old Arkansaw was astonished by the lad's story, and when he had concluded his narration, the hunter said:

"Then the poor young thing never got through. The hoss came all right, but no girl. I should think if the red-skins got her, they'd taken the hoss too; so it's my solemn opinion that she's been killed."

"Oh, merciful heavens!" cried the boy, "I hope such is not the case. I cannot bear to think Elwe is dead. She was the prettiest girl, Arkansaw, that you ever laid your eyes on. And, then, she was as gentle as an angel; why, if it hadn't been for them wicked men in the b'loon, I'd 'a' believed she war sent from heaven direct."

"Love! love!" muttered the old borderman. "I never knowed a boy to rescue a gal from danger in my life but he fell in love with her, heels over head. And then they're alers angels—beauchiful, and all this sort of things, even if they're ugly as mud fences. Like as not your Elwe'd look like a bird without plumage to me. You see, old eyes and young eyes don't see alike. I used to see an angel in every gal's face, but, how're you angels now? After I got jilted forty-seven times, the female sex became very plain—really human. But it's mighty queer 'bout that balloon business—some mystery. Why didn't you ax your angel 'bout it, Silver Star?"

"I did ask her, and she had just begun telling me when we discovered the Indians coming down upon us. But, Arkansaw, I must know what become of that girl—I will never quit these woods until I know whether she is dead or alive."

"Now, see here, boy; you've got a name all over Dakota and creation for bein' one of the best, slick-st and most successful rangers, and so don't, for pity sake, let this girl-hunt spile all."

"Do you advise me, Arkansaw, to let her go—to not look after her? to leave her, if livin' at the mercy of bloodthirsty savages?"

"Oh, no, Silver Star; be a man—die for lovely woman, if necessary—and you want to; but don't go too hasty. Keep cool and calculate carefully, and then see how she'll figger up. Now, Captain Barns and nine of the soldiers are camped up here waiting for me to return with some game for breakfast, and if you'll wait till I block out a chunk of that dead deer, we'll go up to camp."

"Did you fire at that deer, Arkansaw?" the boy questioned.

"I did, for a fact."

"And so did I, though I did not hear your gun. There are two bullet-holes in the animal's side. We must have fired simultaneously."

"Yes, for I didn't hear your gun till you begun to rattle off checks to them red-skins. Heavens, how you managed that battle, for a boy. You're a good one, I'll vow. I'm awful glad to meet you, Silver Star; here, give us a shake—like to forgot that; but say, jist don't say anything to the boys 'bout the way I got that White Crane fixed up to abolish him. They might consider it a thunderated good joke on—on—well, the tree we war huggin' up so skrimp-shus. Jist kind o' leave it all to me; I'll fix up this battered mug o' mine, to the boys, satisfactorily."

The scouts secured a portion of the deer, and the weapons of the fallen red-skins and at once set out for camp, where they soon arrived.

Silver Star was received in camp with shouts of joy; but great was their surprise when the men saw the face of Old Arkansaw, bruised and bleeding; and they at once plied him with questions regarding his injuries.

This the old man had expected, and as he promised Silver Star, he fixed the matter up by a slight exaggeration of facts in a manner that reflected credit upon himself.

While the old frontiersman and one of the soldiers were preparing the venison for breakfast, Silver Star told Captain Barns of all that had transpired since he left the fort. The captain was astounded at the story of the balloon and the disappearance of the maiden, and many and various were the conjectures concerning the aeronauts and their strange conduct. With what little that Silver Star had gathered of their conversation, Captain Barns felt satisfied that the girl, Elwe, was the victim of some conspiracy, foul and malicious.

"But the maiden must be found, be she dead or alive," the soldier said. "One of the pickets said your horse came in from the direction of Deep Ford; and as this crossing is in the vicinity of the Indian village, she might have fallen into savage power."

"If so, then there may be some hope of finding her," declared the young scout; "but at any rate, I'm going to hunt for her, until I know her fate."

"And you can count on my assistance," said the officer.

Breakfast being prepared and eaten, the party mounted their animals, and took their departure east, along the river.

As they had brought Silver Star's horse along with them, the youth once more found himself at home in the saddle, and that, too, with his shield-star blazing brightly upon his breast in the morning light.

The party rode on until noon when they halted for dinner and to await the coming of night. They were not far from the Indian village now, and what was to be done must be done under cover of night.

With restless impatience Silver Star watched the sun go down, and when the shadows of night again settled over all, the youth, in company with Old Arkansaw, mounted his horse and rode off up the river to make a reconnoissance of the Indian village. An hour's ride brought them within sight of a hundred twinkling lights on the opposite side of the river.

"Great Scotland!" exclaimed Silver Star, pointing across toward the town: "I'd give my whole right and title to all Dakota if I could go through yon hornet's nest like a volley of grape-shot."

"I wish so, too, boy, if wishin' 'll do any good," replied Old Arkansaw; "but I'll bet the red bastions have all got their optics skinned and their auraculars open. I jist want to meet that sweet-scented White Crane again, and if I don't show him a thing or two I'll give my head for a toad-stool. If I should meet him to-night, I'd spatter his carcass all over this territory, and redder the moonshine with his blood. The cowardly sneakin' ole bastion! Hivens! how I should like to clap them paws upon him again!" and the old scout brought his palms together until they cracked like a pistol-shot.

"Suppose we go over and stir that hornits' nest up, anyhow?" suggested the Boy Knight.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the scout, softly; "a boy can't pass a hornits' nest without shying a stone at it. But then, I'm in fur anything that's full of fun and fire. We might go over and charge into their village and—then charge out again before the varmints sting, though it'll be awful risky. Jerusalem crickets! won't it raise a seethin' howl! Why, nothin' 'll compare with it since the morning stars sung together, and the Romans charged on Bunker Hill."

"Well, we'll have to go up the river to cross."

"Can't we swim her here?—like Washington did the raging Rubicon?"

"No; the banks are too steep," replied the youth, leading the way up the river.

In a few minutes they came to what was known as the Deep Ford; and entering the stream, they crossed to the other side. Just as they were emerging from the water, the keen eyes of the Boy Knight caught sight of two canoes standing alongside of each other in the shadows of the bank, a rod or so below the crossing. There was an occupant in each boat. Silver Star said nothing of his discovery until some distance from the river, when he drew rein and requested his companion to do likewise. Then he told Arkansaw of what he had seen, and dismounting, he left his horse in the old scout's care, and started back to ascertain, if possible, who the two were in the canoes. He approached the river with the silence of a shadow, and at length came within earshot of the two unknown persons. Listening intently, he was surprised to hear some one, speaking English, say:

"One of the horses looked like that which crossed here last night."

To this a girlish voice replied:

"That was the dreaded young pale-face upon him."

"Who?" exclaimed the man, apparently excited; "Silver Star?"

"Yes; did you not see the star upon his breast?" the Indian maiden—for such the venturesome boy discovered her to be—replied.

"Had I known that, he would never have escaped alive."

"Does Silent Heart fear him like my people?"

Ah! who is Silent Heart? thought the listener.

"No; I do not fear him; but he is my enemy and your enemy, Nathelah."

"Yes; and he is going toward our village," replied the maiden, "and Nathelah should hurry and alarm the village."

"Do not be in a hurry, Nathelah; your people are not asleep. Silent Heart has much to say, for it will be many moons before he sees his sweetheart again. I am going away."

"Going away? Is Silent Heart tired of Nathelah? Does a fairer one sing words of love in his ear?" the girl asked.

"I will meet you here again, Nathelah. Watch by the river, and when a broken oar floats by the village, meet me here. I will come."

"And will you love Nathelah then as now?"

"Why should I not? Have I not pledged my love to you?"

"They tell me the tongue of the pale-face lover sometimes is crooked."

"Why should you doubt me, Nathelah?"

"Did the river not give to you one fairer than Nathelah? Is she not in the wigwam of the Silent Heart? and can her smiles and soft voice not win his heart?"

"Never, Nathelah, never!"

This assurance seemed to quiet the jealous fears of the Indian girl, and after a few minutes more of stolen bliss, their interview ended. The maiden headed her canoe down-stream, and the lover turned his in the opposite direction. In a minute or two both had disappeared.

Ever ready to grasp at straws, the Boy Knight began to analyze the conversation of the lovers. He wondered who Nathelah could be jealous of—who the fair one was that the river had given to Silent Heart. Could it have been Elwe?

The boy started at the question, and with the thought uppermost in his mind he returned to Old Arkansaw and made known his discovery, but without claiming any material benefit of what he had heard more than that the Indian girl would return to the village and inform her friends that Silver Star was about, and put them on their guard.

"Then let us rack out like a small hurricane," said Old Arkansaw, "and git down there ahead of the dusky brat, and go through the town like jagged lightning!"

So saying, they galloped toward the Indian village, Old Arkansaw taking the lead. Silver Star did not exactly know what his old companion's course of action was; but he made up his mind to follow him wherever he dared to go.

Straight on toward the Sioux town galloped the reckless scouts, and the nearer they approached it the faster they rode. Not a savage seemed to dispute their way, and without the least alarm being raised, they suddenly dashed into the outskirts of the village.

And now arose a Pandemonium of noises on the October night. Old Arkansaw uttered a yell of defiance and discharged his revolver at the nearest savage. Silver Star followed his example, and then, putting spur, they thundered away through the dark part of the villa, with the yelping of dogs, the shouts and cries of women and children, and the yells of the warriors trailing after them until night became hideous with the sounds. But as well might they have pursued the wind, for, ere they were aware of the fact, the raiders were in the woods—out of reach of all dangers.

But so successful had been the ride of the fearless scouts that Silver Star was not content to let well enough alone, and he resolved to make another dash. It is true, nothing had been accomplished by the charge, aside from the wild excitement it created; but this was not what had taken the Boy Knight there. He was in search of Elwe; and no sooner did he find himself in the woods with the savages all drawn from the village in pursuit, than he resolved to take advantage of the moment, and run another and greater risk in Elwe's behalf.

Without saying a word to Old Arkansaw, he turned abruptly to the right and galloped away through the woods back to the river. Then, turning down the stream, he again entered the Indian town on the south side, at which point he knew the place was deserted, the savages—men, women and children—being at the other side of the village.

With impunity, the daring boy galloped down into the very heart of the Indian town. He knew enough of Indian habits and customs to know that the prison lodge was located near the center of the village, and always designated by some peculiar device. As he advanced the young scout selected this lodge from among the many, and rode straight toward it. In a moment more he was at the door of the tent. No one was there to dispute his way, and leaning forward in his stirrups he raised the flap-door and looked in. But, darkness filled the apartment—he heard, he saw nothing.

"Elwe? Elwe, are you here?" he called out, but there was no response. Again he called the name of Elwe. A yell was the only answer. It was a savage yell.

A number of squaws seeing him, gave the alarm in the most frightful, discordant screams that ever issued from human lungs; and in another moment that swarm of savages was rolling back from

woods like an angry pack of wolves. Putting spur the Boy Knight pushed on through the village westward. Before him lay an open level expanse of meadow, flooded with the mellow moonlight.

The savages seeing the course he had taken, began to spread out to the right to head him off; and the crash of firearms now was added to the direful sound of savage lungs. Lead whistled over and around the young horseman thick as hail. But he was not destined to escape unpunished this time. A bullet struck his ankle, inflicting a serious and painful wound. The shock paralyzed his whole leg, and it was only by a desperate effort that he succeeded in keeping his seat in the saddle.

"Oh, by heavens!" he exclaimed, as the pain shot through his body, forcing a groan from his lips, "I've got it at last, and got it badly, too. I'd ought to have known better than to come back here into this hornets' nest. I believe my leg is shot off. Oh, Prince, my good old horse; the red demons are mountin' and pursuin' us!"

He was now on an open plain, but a belt of timber lay a short distance before him, and straight toward the nearest point he held his way.

Almost on the very margin of the woods the animal came to a sudden stop, nearly pitching his wounded rider forward over his head.

"Another confounded blunder!" exclaimed the boy, for before him ran a deep, yawning rift that he had never thought of before, yet knew was there.

He glanced back—to the right and left. Mounted savages were coming rapidly across the opening. He was in a dangerous predicament. He could not escape by swimming the river, for the banks he knew were high and precipitous. The rift was before him, and the approaching savages now completed the envolving circle. Escape seemed impossible, and capture would be certain death.

Before him a tree had been felled so as to span the channel. The top side of this log had been hewn away to a flat surface over twelve inches in width. This had been used by the Indians as a foot-log, and the sight of it suggested a means of escape to the daring young knight. But he was wounded, as he believed, so that he could not walk. The only way he could effect his escape was by deserting his horse and dragging himself along upon his hands and knees the best he could. A moment's reflection, however, convinced him that he could never elude the savages by this means, and all hope had faded from his breast, when out of the darkness of the woods upon the opposite side of the chasm, a voice cried out:

"Dismount, boy, and cross on the log!" It was the voice of Old Arkansaw.

"I can't, Arkansaw; one of my legs is shot off, I guess," was the boy's cool response.

"Oh, great Babylon!—boy, they'll abolish you! See! they're comin' a thousand million strong! My God, Silver Star! what are you goin' to do, boy?"

The lad had turned his horse's head and was urging it toward the chasm.

"I'm goin' to ride over on this log, Arkansaw, or die in the attempt," replied the boy; "steady, Prince, steady."

"Farewell then, brave boy, farewell!" groaned the old plainsman, as he saw the trained horse, obedient to its master's will, place its fore feet upon the narrow bridge and then with a spring plant the others close behind them. He saw the horse, with neck extended and form quivering over the precipice, take one step; but he saw no more, for he turned his head to shut out the scene that followed.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTRUDER IN CAMP.

OLD ARKANSAW heard the sound of the horse's hoofs upon the log, and heard it snorting with fright; he heard the voice of his young friend speaking words of command and encouragement to his horse—he heard the wild screams of the approaching savages—all, seemingly, blended in one awful, horrible sound that numbed his very senses, and transfixed him with fear and terror. His heart seemed to rise in his throat, and a dreadful, choking sensation followed. They were the pangs and burnings of the most painful suspense that man could suffer; and it seemed as if they would never end.

Everything was on a blinding whirl about the old hunter.

"Come, Arkansaw," suddenly exclaimed a voice, and a horseman swept past him.

The spell was broken. It was the voice of Silver Star—the Boy Knight was safe! He had safely ridden his horse over the chasm upon the footlog—performed a miracle!

The old hunter started up, gave utterance to a yell of joy, and putting spur, dashed away after the fearless boy.

Dumb with astonishment, the red-skins paused upon the edge of the chasm. Then a cry of baffled triumph bursts from their throats. A few dismount, and running across upon the log, start in pursuit of the Boy Knight.

Away through the forest sped the two scouts. They followed the river a few miles, when they finally rode into the stream and crossed to the opposite shore. Continuing on, they soon reached camp, when Silver Star was assisted from his horse and his wound examined.

It was found that the ball had struck his ankle, inflicting a very painful, but not dangerous wound. The whole foot and leg had been completely paralyzed by the shock; but this gradually wore off, leaving the sense of pain more acute.

Captain Barns dressed the wound as well as means at command would permit; and recommended a frequent application of cold water to allay the pain and fever.

Already the soldiers had taken the necessary pre-

cautions to guard against a surprise by the Indians. Besides the four guards stationed at as many different points, the location selected for a camp possessed great natural advantages as a defensive position. It was guarded upon one side by the river, and then nearly surrounded by a horse-shoe shaped body of water upon the other sides, thus forming a kind of a peninsula that could be reached only by way of a narrow neck of land.

The peninsula was about five acres in area—a low, sandy tract of land covered with tall, dense timber, and strewn with driftwood and debris, for the place was subject to overflows during high water.

In the very center of this point had the soldiers lighted a camp-fire; and after the return of Arkansaw and Silver Star, and the wound of the latter had been dressed, and the story of their adventures narrated, all seated themselves around the fire and engaged in a quiet conversation.

Thus an hour had passed, when suddenly a shrill, strange voice pierced through the solemn stillness of the place and started soldier and scout to his feet.

The tramp of feet and the cracking of dry brush was heard, and a moment later one of the guards came into camp, escorting as queer-looking a creature as it had been their lot to look upon in many a day; and what was most strange, the person was a woman—a white woman, well on toward fifty years of age.

She was dressed in a garb as odd and outlandish as her general appearance. Her dress was made of some heavy, coarse material of a dirty brown color. It was scant in breadth and in length, and just reached to the tops of a pair of number-seven army shoes. Over this dress she wore a pea-green jacket embroidered with red, and trimmed with rows of different-colored beads. Upon her head was a great, flaring bonnet that rose and fell like elephants' ears with each nod and motion of the head. Upon one arm she carried a small beaded sachel which appeared to be well filled; and in her right hand she carried a great, heavy and clumsy-looking umbrella that seemed to be the worse of long usage.

"Well, by the Holy Jerusalem!" exclaimed Old Arkansaw, as his eyes fell upon the form of the fair stranger; "what under the moon and shinin' stars have you found, Rathbone?"

"A woman," replied the half-mortified soldier.

"Yes, a woman!" fairly shrieked the female, with blazing eyes, while she shook her big umbrella over Arkansaw's head in a threatening manner—"a poor, sad-hearted and lonely woman—the wreck of former beauty, the victim of man's perfidy and inconstancy—the relic of as owdashus an old scoundrel as led an innocent, confidin' gal to the hyenial altar. That's who I am."

"By the dauncin' dervishes!" responded Arkansaw, "it seems to me I've seed' you before, ole lady. Isn't your name Bandy—Mrs.—"

"Yes, yes!" she screamed, her whole frame set a-quiver, it seemed, by mention of the name Bandy; "my name is Ellen Sabina Bandy—the wronged, deserted and injured wife of that owdashus, ungrateful vagabone, Christopher Columbus Bandy."

"That's it edzactly; I seed' you years ago down in Nubraska. Yes, gentlemen and soldiers, this is the relic of old Kit Bandy, of whom I war tellin' you yesterday."

"Yes, and please gracious, I'll relic him when I git hands on him again!" added the woman. "I'll put a stop to his rumagin' around over this hemisfear like a gay young courtier. I'll pluck his eyes out like a vulture—oh, you may laff and laff at a helpless woman till your diaframs rips wide open, but when you've suffered as I've suffered, you'll know how to sympathize with me. Not one mother's brat of you'd suffer half what I have, and keep your youth and beauty. Oh! but I'll make that ole vagabone smart like pepper when I meet him again! He promised, at the hyenial altar, to love, cherish and protect me till death did us part; and I'm determined to hold him in the breachin' with a square rein. He shall never lavish his hypocritical smiles and gallantries on any other female that ever wore hair—no, never!"

"Pr'aps, Mrs. Bandy," suggested Old Arkansaw, "if you'd smooth your feathers, and curb your conversational powers, when the old man's about, he'd remain with you. I reckon as what you go for him like jagged lightnin'."

"Oh, gracious preachers! hav'n't I melted myself into all smiles and sweetnesses and lovelinesses all for that ungrateful critter? And how, gentlemen, did he reward me? Why, it was tryin' to murder me," and her voice fell to a whisper; "yes, tried to murder me!" she again broke forth, with violent gestures, "by puttin' a burr under my horse's tail one day when I started for a ride."

"I'll bet you got even with him," said Arkansaw.

"Please gracious I did, old covey! One day, when he was takin' his noon nap on a blanket under a tree on the banks of the Yuba, I brought the edges of the blanket together and sewed him up in it with a big stone at his feet. Then I rolled the old cavalier into the river—he! he! he!—and by means of a rope attached to the blanket, I let him down, then hauled him to surface, then ker-soused him under again; and in this way I made him beg like a hungry Italian. He promised to love me, to obey me, to be my own slave, to die for me if necessary, to—"

"Did he keep his promises?" interrupted the old scout.

"No!" she shrieked; "not a single, lonely one of them, the false, deceptive heathen! And it nearly kills me when I think of my galhood days when that owdacious critter come a-courtin' of me so gay, with his pockets full of sweetmeats, and his tongue drippin' with nice poetry. Oh, what a fool I was! But I war young and handsome, the neighbors said, and every feller in the country courted my smiles."

Foolish girl, I were; I sailed over a flower-bed and lit in a mud-puddle when I took ole Kit Bandy for better or worse."

"What does your husband follow, Mrs. Bandy?" asked Captain Barns, with a suppressed smile.

"Everything under the shinin' sun, but mostly a nose bigger than your fist. He's been a preacher and a wood-chopper, a doctor and a hog-drover, a lawyer and a bullwhacker, a judge and a robber, and now pretends, I understand, to be a scout and a detective. But a purty scout and detective he'd make! If I detect him, I'll bet he'll get a scoutin' he don't want. He's been tryin', for years, to toll me off into the Ingin country thinkin' I'd git skaped, or a robber'd steal me for his bride; but, please gracious, I find the Ingins respect a white woman's beauty and virtue, so that I've been an honored guest wherever I went, whether 'mong Ingins or robbers. I've been even offered a home among the red-skins, and but yesterday that noble chief, White Crane, offered to make me a queen if I'd say the word. But I would not percept of the honor till vengeance is mine own. Oh, that the blessed day will soon come when I, Ellen Sabina Bandy, as queen of the great West, can look down with imperial dignity upon ole Kit Columbus Bandy, grovelin' in the dust at them feet beggin' to kiss the hem of my royal robe!"

"You're too revengeful toward your husband, Mrs. Bandy," said one of the soldiers.

"Heaven forbid," answered the woman, seating herself upon a great, hollow log, and rocking herself to and fro as if to nurse her wrath and sorrows. She remained silent for some time, then she took a small slip of paper from her sachel and reading it over, crushed it in her hand with a spiteful hiss. What she finally did with the paper no one knew, but she disposed of it in a strange, sly manner.

"Well, Mrs. Bandy," said Captain Barns, "it is but my duty as a soldier and a gentleman to offer you the hospitalities of our camp. We will do the best we can to make you comfortable."

"Oh, I thank you," responded the woman, in a lower tone. "I can't tarry. I heard you were down here, and so I come down to inquire if you had seen any thing of my lost darlin', Kit Columbus Bandy. I must return to-night to the Indian town; I promised I would."

"Well, we have seen or heard nothing of your husband."

"Haven't! Well, I'll live on in hopes. My day'll come yet."

"Then you come and go among the Indians at will?"

"Yes; I've a passport to and from the Ingin village. It was given me by that noble chief, White Crane."

"Have you any idea that your old tulip, Kit Bandy, is in this country?" inquired Old Arkansaw.

"Yes, I have a purty strong idea that way; I seed' the track of a white man 'long the river t'other day that looks adzactly like that old blister's track. Whenever you see a track that looks like the imprint of an elephant's hoof, and follow it up, you'll find old Kit Bandy at the end of the trail."

"Well, now look here, Mrs. Bandy," said Silver Star, rising to his feet, and hobbling over to where the old woman sat; "I'm scoutin' around through the country a deal of a sight, and I might be of some service to you upon condition you assist me a little."

"Well, I'll do any thing in my power for you, son, if you'll jist watch out for my old blister, and report when you find him."

"I'll do so; and now I want to ask you one question: is there a young girl in the Indian village—a captive?"

"None to my knowin'; and if there'd been any I'd a-knowed it, rest assured. If there's a gal lost, like as not when you find her you'll find old Kit Bandy with her tryin' to make her believe he's a gay young soul, and that he loves her unto death, and that she ought to reciprocate. But, please gracious, them ugly old eyes and that big, alligator mouth, and them jack-mule's ears, and them old gutters on his face 'll not let him deceive another young, beautiful and innocent gal—no, never!" and she punctuated her remarks by driving the end of her umbrella into the sand at her feet.

A moment's silence ensued, and as no one seemed disposed to ask Sabina any further questions, she took a clay pipe and some tobacco from her sachel. Filling the pipe, she advanced to the fire and taking up a red-hot coal in her fingers, laid it upon the pipe and began puffing vigorously, and in a moment her face was lost behind a cloud of smoke.

"Now, men and soldiers," she finally remarked, "I'm goin' to departure, and, please gracious, I hope you will not forgit a wronged and injured woman. If you can give me any information that'll lead to the recovery of Kit Bandy, you shall be liberally rewarded—if not on earth, in heaven. So now, good-night, folks."

So saying, she turned and started happily away, puffing at her pipe and balancing her big umbrella upon her hands with remarkable skill.

"I'll be eternally blessed if that isn't a kind o' folks we don't often see 'round this kentry!" exclaimed Old Arkansaw.

The soldiers gave way to an outburst of laughter. "She may be an Indian spy, boys," suggested Silver Star, seriously. "I don't like the looks of her."

"No danger o' that," replied Arkansaw; "but then, she's a regular clipper; and mean as she makes old Kit Bandy out as a husband, I tell you he's a glorious old boss to stand in the harness with when danger's around, and I'd like to bump ag'inst him in these diggin's. I met him several years ago down

on the Ree-publican; and I tell you we had a rollockin' good time. But, somehow 'r other, I hearn he'd been skinned alive by the Ingins and killed, and so I never thought any more about him, than that a brave ole soul had gone to rest—harkee!"

The shrill, piercing voice of Sabina came to the ears of all; and listening to her words they found she was giving the guard, upon the riverside, a sound blessing for daring to challenge her and refusing to allow her to pass the lines. But their passage of words soon ended, and our friends at camp were momentarily expecting the woman back to report the guard, when to their surprise the guard himself appeared in great excitement.

"Captain," he exclaimed, "what for an infernal old witch was that you allowed to leave camp?"

The soldiers roared with laughter. They saw their comrade was perplexed, embarrassed.

"Why, Carlford, she was an innocent woman," explained the captain; "an innocent, harmless old woman."

"Innocent woman! well, at any rate she's got a tongue equal to forked lightning; and what's more, boys, she's a witch."

"Bah! that's bosh, Carlford," said the captain, reprovingly.

"Bosh, or no bosh, captain, that woman, defying my challenge and threats, deliberately walked down to the water's edge, and walked out upon the stream!"

A general laugh ensued.

"I care not what you say, that woman walked out across the river upon the water! I saw her on the open moonlit water. Her feet seemed surrounded by a dark nimbus, and of this I am certain. The current bore her down-stream several rods before she disappeared in the shadows of the opposite shore. I'll swear to it if it is my last words on earth!"

As Carlford was known to be a brave and truthful soldier, his story, so firmly persisted in, created no little excitement among his friends. It was too late, however, to make any further investigations of the matter, and so quiet was once more restored in camp.

About midnight the guards were changed, and those off duty concluded to lay down and take a few hours' sleep and rest. Silver Star's wound had ceased to pain him, and he soon fell asleep. Old Arkansaw was the last to lie down, and when he did, all the rest were asleep. He was possessed of a large blue blanket with the figure of a ferocious tiger worked in the center in red, and an eagle with outspread wings in each corner. Laying down upon the dry sand, with his head in the hollow of his saddle, he drew this highly-prized blanket over him and went to sleep.

The fire burned down, and the low, damp air of the peninsula became heavy and chill. This made the sleepers a little restless, but none of them awoke. Old Arkansaw tossed and floundered around more than his companions. Finally he awoke to find himself uncovered. He felt for his blanket, but he could not find it. He rose to a sitting posture and found it was gone—had been removed! He glanced around him, and to his surprise and indignation saw his blue blanket with its red eagles and couchant tiger, rolled and wrapped carefully around a form on the opposite side of the fire.

"Well, I'll be eternally, everlastin'ly abolished! If that don't beat all the infernalated cheek and impudence that I ever dreamt of. I never s'posed a soldier could be guilty of such meanness," soliloquized the old borderman, his face wrought with the hard lines of indignation; "a man, that 'd steal the only blanket off a sleepin' man, and then boldly lay down by his side and roll himself in it, as that hog's done, would cut a dead man's throat to steal the coppers off his eyes. That dastardly trick is a disgrace to the uniform of the narrow-souled wretch that wears it, cussed if it ar'n't."

"Arkansaw, it is not a soldier," said a voice at the old man's side—the voice of Silver Star—who, awakening from his slumber, had overheard the old scout's remarks.

"Ay, 'tis you, Silver Star," the borderman exclaimed, with a sudden start; "but how do you know it's not a soldier? He's covered from head to foot."

"I can see he is *not* a soldier, as well as you can see that he *is*, for neither can see the man himself. You know there are four men on guard, and seven here in camp besides you and me. There lie seven forms, and that one in your blanket makes eight, so you see he is not a soldier but a stranger, be he red or white. But who it can be the Lord only knows."

"By the New Jerusalem! I am goin' to know!" exclaimed the old scout, white with rage; and drawing his revolver, he advanced toward the form reposing so sweetly and quietly in his blanket.

"Be careful, Arkansaw," cautioned the Boy Knight, "there is no telling what the result may be—what terrible tragedy is about to be enacted!"

CHAPTER VII.

KIT BANDY.

OLD ARKANSAW paused before he reached the prostrate form wrapped in his blanket to consider the words of caution given by Silver Star. What danger could result from the situation? Had the unknown stolen into camp and taken his blanket to provoke a quarrel? and if so, was the quarrel to be the signal for an attack upon the camp by concealed enemies? Had the guards been circumvented and killed? and the rest placed at the mercy of the Indians?

These questions the old plainsman revolved through his mind time and again; then he turned and awoke Captain Barns and his men. Accustomed to such silent awakenings, the soldiers made no noise nor demonstration, but, rising to their feet,

they seized their weapons, tightened their belts and looked carefully to the priming of their fire-arms. When all were ready for the worst, Old Arkansaw advanced to the side of the apparently sleeping intruder, and taking hold of the edge of his blanket, pulled it upward with all his quickened strength. The form was set rolling by this movement, and resulted in a man being tossed out upon the sand in full view of all.

And a queer-looking specimen of humanity it was. He was tall and angular, with ill-proportioned limbs and with a bullet head set upon a long, scrawny neck. Large ears, a prominent nose, a wide mouth and small gray eyes were some of the natural appendages of his features—all of which seemed to have been placed upon the head and face of the wrong man, and were several sizes too large for the face they ornamented. A serio-comical smile rested upon the man's countenance, and as he rose to a sitting posture and gazed in feigned bewilderment around him, he exclaimed, in an indignant tone:

"Dimmition! What in the name of the great Mogul does this mean, anyway? Horn of old Joshua! Can't a man take a quiet rest? Can't a weary soul lay down and sleep without bed-bugs or pirates routin' him? Hav'n't you fellers got a smiggin of manners? Well, I've a notion to get up and maul the stuffin' outen every mother's brat of you, confound your or—"

"By the stars above us!" burst from the lips of Old Arkansaw.

"Well, now, what ails you, old reel-legged persimmon knocker?" asked the intruder, turning upon Arkansaw.

"It's old Kit Bandy, as I'm a livin' beauty!" responded the scout.

"Oh, horn that tumbled old Jericho!" replied the veritable Kit Bandy, for he the intruder proved to be, as he sprung to his feet, and extended his horny hand; "if I hav'n't met my pious old friend, Arkansaw Abel! Give us your paw, Arky, you old skinflint, you! Dog my cats, if I knowed it war you when I 'propriated your blanket—not a bit of it, Arky. Well, bless my old optics! You're still aboard o' the great lifeboat, ar'n't ye? You're the same old Arkansaw Traveler, ar'n't ye? Ugly as you war the day you war born, ar'n't ye? Older'n you war when I see'd ye last, ar'n't ye? Crows 's been trackin' yer face up, ar'n't they? Well, well, Arky," and the odd old genius again shook the scout's hand.

"Yes, yes, I'll admit all this, Kitsie, and that I'm powerful glad to squeeze your phalanges and metacarples ag'in," replied Arkansaw; "but I must confess that your youth and Adonis-like beauty is gittin' some'at marred by the wear and tear of Time."

"I know all that, Arky, and more too; but you must remember that I'm a married man; and if you know anything 'bout married life, you know a man don't live like a little ambrosial god upon nectar distilled from sweetest flowers by the hands of wood-nymphs and fairies. Oh, great horn of Joshua, no! If I war to tell you all the trials and tribulations I've had since I hitched on with Ellen Sabina Bandy for better or for worse—but always for worse—your hair'd stand out on end, and you'll want to shoot your own shadder. I don't b'lieve a devilisher old woman ever hopped on *terry-firmy*, or ever hatched up more blisterin' misery for man than that same identical Ellen Sabina Ban—"

The rest of the name was drowned in an outburst of laughter from the lips of Old Arkansaw and the soldiers.

The old intruder was now introduced by Arkansaw to Captain Barns and his men, when a general conversation followed. At length Old Arkansaw said:

"Kit, ole comrade, would you believe it if I war to tell you that your wife, Sabina Bandy, has been in our camp to-night?"

"Great holy horn!" exclaimed Bandy, with a violent start, "you wouldn't say so for a fact, would you, Arky? You jist want to torture me a leetle, don't you? For the love of our constitution, stab me in the back—shoot me, burn me—torture me any way than by such means. The very mention of my wife's name gives me the compound-hydrophobia. Just think of that."

"It is a fact, Mr. Bandy; a lady calling herself Sabina Bandy—the wife of Kit Bandy—has been here to-night," said Captain Barns, in confirmation of Arkansaw's story.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the old man; "I thought I smelt brimstone. Won't that woman last forever? Won't old Time *ever* mow her down along with the other pizen weeds and plants of humanity? The everlastin' old blister she is! I'll swear, I b'lieve she's a born witch. Where'd she go?"

"A huntin' of you," answered Arkansaw.

"Blast her old eyes! Ar'n't she a ripper though, boys? Do you blame me much for cuttin' loose from sich an old brig and driftin' out to sea alone? Do you blame me, Arky?"

"Can't say that I do, Kit; but now I want to ask you a question," said Arkansaw.

"Peg away, Arky."

"How came you here in camp?"

"Them old stilts swung me down here, and as you war all asleep, I didn't think it necessary to wake you to tell ye I'd arriv'; but, takin' your blanket, for it was awfully chilly, I laid down to—"

The report of a rifle burst suddenly through the night, cutting short the old man's words.

"War! by the horn of Joshua! To arms!" yelled old Kit Bandy, at the top of his brazen lungs.

In a moment every man, with rifle and revolver in hand, stood upon the defense, peering into the gloom beyond the radius of light. The yells of Indians started the echoes of night, and the next moment the guard, who had been on duty at the isthmus,

came running into camp, pursued by a score and more of savages.

"Take aim! fire!" commanded Captain Barns.

The crash of muskets and revolvers tore through the night with a horrible din, and with it were mingled the cries and groans of the red-skins. A number of Indians fell. But others came from the darkness to take their places. Two-score strong now pressed hard upon the little band of soldiers, forcing them back into the woods. They poured a volley of arrows and bullets into their ranks. Two soldiers and Kit Bandy fell.

At this juncture Captain Barns saw that it would be certain destruction to contend with such odds, and at once sounded a retreat.

Silver Star rose to his feet and attempted to follow them, but his wounded limb refused to obey its office, and he fell. The next instant the savages were upon him; he was a helpless prisoner.

The victorious red-skins pursued Old Arkansaw and the soldiers into the woods, but, favored by the darkness, the latter succeeded in reaching their horses and escaping to the mainland.

One by one the red-skins returned to camp, feeling satisfied with the capture of Silver Star. To them the Boy Knight was more than all the soldiers would have been. To them he had been a source of constant trouble. He had been a dreaded scourge—watching and defeating all their well-laid plans.

And full well the young scout and spy knew his danger. He felt that there was no hope for him, wounded and helpless as he was. He yielded quietly to his fate, and inwardly mourned the death of Kit Bandy. He turned his eyes upon the prostrate form of the old man. He saw the savages fear the scalps from the heads of the fallen soldiers and spurn their bodies with the foot. He expected to see Bandy served in a like brutal manner; but to his horror and surprise, he saw the supposed dead man move—raise his head, glance around him, and then rise to his feet. He made no attempt to escape, nor did the red-skins offer him violence. On the contrary he was greeted with a yell of triumph which told that he was a friend of the Indians—a traitor to the whites! He was allowed the freedom of the camp. He conversed in the Indian dialect with the triumphant warriors. He ordered them to bind the Boy Knight to a tree. They bound him firmly to a stunted pine. Then Bandy and some of the warriors went away—to search for the soldiers and Arkansaw as Silver Star believed.

The savages left to guard the boy—a dozen strong—inflicted many cruelties upon him; but the brave lad bore them without a murmur.

The search for Old Arkansaw and the soldiers went on, but without success. Those at camp, tortured Silver Star until they became tired of their futile attempts to make him flinch. Yet they were wild and noisy—they were intoxicated with their victory. They danced and sung around the fire, with the scalps of the soldiers flourished upon poles.

The minutes wore away into a couple of hours. The young prisoner was suffering more from his cutting bonds than his wound. But, suddenly, he felt the bonds relax—felt some one behind the tree fingering them, for they passed around the trunk of the pine as well as his body. It flashed across his mind in an instant that some one was trying to release him; but who had dared venture there? Whoever he was he was concealed in the shadow of the tree; to be seen would be death.

The next moment that mysterious chief, White Crane, walked by the youth, casting a contemptuous look down at him as he passed, and joined the warriors in their scalp-dance around the fire.

Silver Star felt certain that this mysterious chief had again endeavored to befriend him, and had loosened his bonds. But, what would this avail the boy? He could scarcely walk, nor could he escape by crawling. Moreover, he dare not move through fear that his bonds, that were still hanging in position, would fall to the ground and betray his liberty.

"At last," White Crane finally broke forth, as if unable to restrain himself longer, "has the young pale-faced dog fallen into our power. No longer will he watch like a hawk the movements of the Sioux. My heart thirsts for his blood! The stake awaits his torture. Glory will it be to White Crane to see the flames leaping high around him, fed by the grease out of his own carcass. Let my warriors rejoice! On with our scalp-dance! Ha-ya! ha-ya!" and the old renegade went whirling away in a wild dance, chanting a demoniac Indian song. The warriors followed him, and for several minutes they continued leaping and singing and yelling around the fire, wild and crazy with the excitement worked up in their breasts and brains by the words of their chief.

Suddenly, however, the renegade stopped short, and turning toward the pine tree, exclaimed:

"Fiends and furies! where is the Boy Knight?"

Every eye was instantly turned toward the tree. They saw the bonds of the lad lying upon the earth, but the boy himself was gone.

Instantly the alarm was sounded, and once more a score of human bloodhounds went forth upon the trail of the Boy Knight of the Prairie.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPARROWHAWK.

THE little peninsula resounded with the wild yells of the baffled red-skins, as they glided hither and there in search of the young scout.

His escape was shrouded in mystery to them; but, let us see how the boy got away—so suddenly, so silently; while White Crane and his warriors were so intoxicated with triumph and lost in the wild frenzy of a scalp-dance, Silver Star became conscious that some one was again fingering his bonds, and ere

he was aware of the fact, a huge hand reached around the tree, and, seizing him by the collar, pulled him around into the shadows of the pine. At the same instant a voice whispered in his ear:

"Arkansaw, boy, Arkansaw!" and then the lad knew who had rescued him, and responded by pressing the old scout's hand. "Git onto my back, boy, and I'll trot you off out of danger—come, now, hurry!" the old man said, in a hurried whisper.

Silver Star could do nothing better than obey, and the next moment he was being borne away through the darkness of the woods on the back of Old Arkansaw. The old scout glided and dodged here and there as though the lad were a mere child. He soon came to the river's edge, and wading into the water, deposited his burden in a canoe that stood concealed among some overhanging willows.

"Wait there till I git my arms and baggage, lad," the scout said, and turning, he went ashore.

The yells of the savages came near in the woods. The boy started with fear and anxiety.

A moment later a footstep sounded close at hand; then a form bounded into the canoe, and taking up the paddle, drove the boat out into the river. Silver Star never dreamed but that the person was Old Arkansaw, but judge of his surprise and consternation upon discovering that a stranger occupied the boat with him. Nor did he appear to be more surprised than did the stranger himself at the presence of the Boy Knight. He ceased paddling and sat like one transfixed, gazing in silent astonishment into the other's face.

Silver Star saw that the stranger was a young man, not over three-and-twenty years of age. He was rather prepossessing in appearance, with dark hair and eyes, with a heavy, black mustache shading an expressive mouth. Upon his head he wore a cap made of the feathered skin of a sparrowhawk. The head and bill of the bird answered for the peak, and presented a rather novel appearance in the mellow glow of the moon. Around his shoulders was a broad collar or cape, made of the quill-feathers of eagles and other large birds, artistically arranged upon buckskin.

This feathered stranger was the first to speak.

"Sir youngster," he said, in a low, deliberate tone, "how come you here in my canoe?"

"By mistake, I presume, if this is your boat," Silver Star responded.

"Well, it is my boat, and I should be glad to know whom I have for a companion—whether friend or foe."

"I am Silver Star."

"The Boy Knight?"

"Yes."

"I am Sparrowhawk, the Outcast. We are enemies," and he drew his revolver.

"I am unarmed and wounded," responded the Boy Knight, fearlessly and unmoved.

"I am not a coward, Silver Star; I will take no advantage of you. But my race are all my enemies. They have hunted me and mine for years—seeking our lives. The hand of man, red-skin and white, is raised against me. You have hunted me, Silver Star, and—"

"You are mistaken, Sparrowhawk; I have not hunted you," the young scout rejoined.

"Yes, you have hunted me, though you may not have known whom you were hunting at the time. Now we have met, face to face. I have the advantage—your life is in my hands. I am armed, but you are not. Were you free, and were we to meet in the open field, you would meet me as an enemy. You would know me, for I wear no disguise. Here, I give you one of my revolvers, and a chance for your life."

Silver Star mechanically took the weapon. The click of Sparrowhawk's pistol started the young knight from his stupor.

By this time the canoe had drifted into the shadows of the southern shore of the river.

The yells of the savages upon the peninsula were still ringing down the night.

Never in all his life did Silver Star experience the feeling that now took possession of him. He saw in the wild, half-demoniac glare of Sparrowhawk's eyes the expression of a madman. Never before had he met this strange being. Was he mad? Why did he imagine himself hunted by every one? As these questions flashed through the boy's brain, he saw that he must act with dispatch.

"Sparrowhawk," he said, "this is folly; we need not be enemies."

"Oh, sir, but we are enemies," he answered, in a strange, determined tone. "Defend yourself."

"Shoot, then, for I will not," said Silver Star, dropping his revolver in the boat, and folding his arms over his breast.

Slowly and deliberately the madman raised his revolver and pointed it at the breast of the boy.

CHAPTER IX.

BULLETS OF AN AVENGER.

"SPARROWHAWK! Sparrowhawk!" cried a voice, as the young madman drew his pistol.

At sound of the voice the hand of the would-be murderer dropped at his side.

Then from the shadows of the shore glided a canoe with two occupants. It ran alongside of that of Silver Star and Sparrowhawk. It contained two occupants—one a young Indian girl, and the other a white woman—the redoubtable Ellen Sabina Bandy herself.

It was the voice of the Indian girl that stayed the hand of Sparrowhawk, and it seemed to act like magic upon the ears of the outcast. His whole face and voice changed in an instant. He started as if from a dream—a horrible nightmare.

"Why, Nathelah, is it you?" he exclaimed.

"And me too, please gracious," put in Sabina

Bandy, flourishing her big umbrella—inviting recognition.

"What would the Sparrowhawk do?" asked the Indian girl, speaking good English. "Would he slay a helpless youth? Is Sparrowhawk a coward?"

"Oh, I'm a fool, at times, fair Nathelah; I am crazy. Pardon me, Silver Star," the outcast said, apologetically, yet the Boy Knight detected a tinge of sarcasm in his tone.

"You'd ort to be laid over my knee and spanked furciously," put in Mrs. Bandy; "this thing o' young folks a-quarrelin' is humiliation. It's bad enough for old folks to fuss and fight; and that reminds me that if I get them paws on my husband, old Kit Columbus Bandy, please gracious I'll be a salivatin' blister to him."

"Mrs. Bandy," said Silver Star, "I left your husband in the Indian camp on the peninsula."

A wild, hysterical cry burst from the old woman's lips, and she was about to respond, when Sparrowhawk exclaimed:

"We must not tarry here; danger surrounds us."

"No, the red-men will find you," declared the maiden.

"Where to go I scarcely know," said Silver Star; "I am wounded and can only hobble along."

"Silver Star is the enemy of my people," said Nathelah, "yet I would not harm an enemy. Let the pale-face boy take Nathelah's canoe and go up the river to his people."

"But what will Nathelah do?" asked the lad.

"I will go with the Sparrowhawk."

Without further words Nathelah and Silver Star exchanged seats. As the latter sat down before Mrs. Bandy, she said:

"Well, now, Silver Star, if you have no objection, I'll go with you. Please gracious, I want to be on the move."

The Boy Knight thought it strange that the old woman did not return to the peninsula where he had left the object of her search, the source of her troubles.

When the occupants of the canoes were ready to start, Sparrowhawk spoke:

"Remember, Silver Star, when we meet again we meet as mortal enemies."

Before Silver Star could reply, he dipped his paddle and sent his canoe rushing through the waters.

"Law-sakes! dear me, what a crusty, crabbed soul that Sparrowhawk is!" decided Mrs. Bandy; "he's most awful queer, too. I can't understand him any better'n I can a Babylonian inscription. I don't b'lieve he's the clear quill, atwixt you and me, Silver Star. He'll shoot in the back, too, if he gets the chance, so you want to look out. You'd been deader'n old Noah if it hadn't been for that sweet little duck of a Nathelah. You see, she's Sparrowhawk's sweetheart—she told me so, the sweet deary. Every few nights they meet up 'bout Deep Ford and bill and coo like doves; but if ever they marry it'll be fight and quarrel like wet hens. Men are most awful deceitful critters, if old Kit Columbus Bandy is a specimen of the average man. But we'd better be pullin' out o' here, son, or them dasted red-skins may come chargin' down onto you."

"You have no fears of them, then?"

"No, only I'd rather not be caught with their enemies. They are naterally good to a female woman, and treat me well. I come and go just as I please."

Silver Star took up the paddle and headed the canoe up the river. He was skilled in the use of the paddle, and sent the craft gliding within the border of shadows that hung along the right shore.

Suddenly, when he believed they were beyond all immediate danger, the prow of the boat struck a log in the water with such violence as to throw the occupants from their seats. Before Silver Star could recover himself, he was seized by violent hands and a savage yell rung in quavering echoes down the wooded halls through which the White Earth wound its way.

Sabina Bandy screamed hysterically; but Silver Star believed her fears were assumed—that she, as well as Kit Bandy, was a traitor to those she claimed as friends; and that she had been instrumental in his recapture.

A couple of savages climbed into the canoe, and with thongs of buckskin bound the hands of the Boy Knight; and by the time this was accomplished, the boat had drifted out into the open, moonlit water.

Silver Star was now permitted to rise to a sitting posture, and the first thing he noticed was that Sabina Bandy was gone. He glanced around him, and saw the woman standing erect and floating down the river in something he could not make out; and before he could ascertain, he was taken ashore; and, notwithstanding his wounded ankle, he was put upon the march and compelled to walk along between his captors.

Three of the savages took the youth in custody, while the others embarked in the canoe down the river. The former had not gone far when they were overtaken by Mrs. Bandy, who, nearly exhausted, exclaimed:

"Red-men, you'd better be careful; the Silent Avenger's in the woods."

This information had its effect upon the Indians, for they quickened their pace, fairly dragging their wounded captive along.

They had journeyed but a short distance, when, suddenly, there was a dull, pistol-like report of a firearm, and a savage yell of agony. One of the Boy Knight's captors had been slain!

A piercing scream from the lungs of Sabina Bandy tore through the air like the scream of a hyena; and, wild with affright, she came bounding up from the rear where she had been lagging.

"Oh, Lord! oh, gracious Peter!" she exclaimed, in gasps; "did—did you hear that? It's as I told you; that was the dull, choked report of that Silent Avenger's weepin'!"

The savages were horror-stricken. The name of the Silent Avenger was fraught with terror to them, for many a comrade had fallen under his deadly aim.

Leaving the body of their fallen comrade, the other two savages hurried on toward the village with their prisoner.

Sabina now took the lead, and with her umbrella in a position for instant defense, she soon left the red-skins and prisoner behind. This was a relief to the savages, for her tongue was never still.

The were nearing the edge of the opening on the western side of the village, when, suddenly, another of those dull, whip-like reports stung through the darkness, and another savage went down, shot through the heart.

This left but one red-skin, and determined to sell his life dearly—even at the cost of losing his captive—and avenge the death of his friend, he drew his tomahawk and bounded into the thicket whence the shot had come, and where he had seen the flash of a gun.

Silver Star stood alone, but with his hands bound. He had been startled by the tragedy enacted under cover of the shadows around him, and stood, like one transfixed, and listened. He heard the retreating footsteps of the dread Silent Avenger, and the pursuing footfalls of the red-skin. He heard the scream of Sabina Bandy directly before him, and then he heard the dull report of the avenger's pistol to his right. A moment's silence ensued, then followed the sound of running feet upon the rustling leaves, and Mrs. Bandy, panting for breath, came up to where Silver Star stood. Her face was white with fear, her frame shook with emotion, and her voice trembled with affright.

"Oh, Lord!—oh, Lord!" she exclaimed, "that dreadful Silent Slayer's abroad! Oh, Silver Star! what will we do? We'll be slain, slain, slain," and she wrung her hands in despair.

"Untie me, Mrs. Bandy," the boy said, and as the woman was engaged in freeing the lad's hands, he continued: "You had better flee to the village, if the Indians are your friends, and stay there. I will take care of myself. I have no desire for your company longer, for you lied on me, when the savages captured us, to shield yourself. Besides, these woods are no place for a hysterical old woman."

Old Sabina laughed softly, derisively; then, as she turned to depart, she said:

"Please gracious, I know my gait, young man, if I am a female woman. I know what I'm about, and you'll know, too, some day, if you keep your scalp," and then, with a spiteful toss of the head, she whirled on her heel and vanished in the darkness.

"What am I to understand by that?" mused the boy, as he turned and hobbled away through the woods; "did I insult the old Xantippe, and did she mean that for a silent threat? or is there something more about that woman than any one suspects?"

Thus musing, the youth moved on a short distance, and sat down to rest his wounded limb. From Sabina his thoughts went back into the past. They brought up the sweet young face of that child of the clouds, the fair Elwe.

"Oh, where was Elwe?" his heart cried out. But there was no solution to the question, and the more he pondered over it, the more vague and painful it became.

One by one he finally took up the other incidents of the past two days and nights, and attempted to solve the mystery connected with most of them.

The conduct of White Crane was extremely singular to him, and what method there could be in it, was entirely beyond his comprehension. The treachery of Old Kit Bandy was palpable enough; but the vengeance of the Silent Slayer was all a mystery. Who the Silent Slayer was no one knew; but Silver Star half suspected the Sparrowhawk.

Altogether, there was a combination of characters and mysteries surrounding the events of the past few days, so greatly complicated that the boy hero gave up all hope of solving it, and rising to his feet, he limped away slowly toward the river.

CHAPTER X.

KIT BANDY AT BAY.

AFTER leaving Silver Star in the canoe, Old Arkansaw went back into the woods to secure his gun and accouterments and when he returned, great was his horror and surprise to find both boat and boy gone.

He listened and heard the dip of a paddle, and looking through the foliage, he saw, out upon the open, moonlit river, a canoe with two occupants rapidly drifting down the river. One of the occupants he knew was Silver Star, but the other he did not recognize. He was about to call to his young friend when the sound of approaching feet warned him of the danger of such an act.

Wading into the river, the old borderman concealed himself under some overhanging willows. The Indians like hounds searching for the trail of a fox, glided past him, never dreaming that a foe was concealed in the water within arm's reach.

Finally Old Arkansaw found himself alone there in the silent depths of night. He knew that Captain Barns and his men had escaped to the mainland. He had seen Kit Bandy fall at the beginning of the fight, and still remained in ignorance of the way matters had terminated with that eccentric old individual, but believed him dead.

When assured that the vicinity was clear of danger, Arkansaw went ashore and followed along the river until he had passed from the peninsula. Then

continuing on up the river toward the Indian village, he finally espied a canoe half-beached upon the shore; and launching it, he resolved to cross over to the opposite shore. Stepping into the craft, he took up the paddle and sent the boat out into the river.

At this point the stream was about one hundred yards wide, and the shore before him was a low, barren sandy beach that shone white under the mellow moonbeams. Beyond this ran the woods and its dark shadows like the grim walls of a battlement. Upon this the eyes of the plainsman were fixed as he plied his paddle, and when about half-way over the stream he was startled by sight of a dark object that emerged from the shadows and approached the river. It was plainly outlined against the white, sloping beach. It was neither a beast nor a human, and yet it was possessed of life—it was moving—rolling across the sand—approaching the river.

The paddle became motionless in Arkansaw's hand. The cold sweat started from every pore in his body. Like all men of his class he was superstitious, and in the strange object there was something unnatural. It was round—resembled a huge ball—and coal-black; it was a mystery, true enough. It came down to the water's edge and there paused. Old Arkansaw kept his eyes fixed upon it, and suddenly he saw a little jet of flame spit from its center, and heard the whiplike report of a gun come over the water.

Then a wild wail or agony burst from under the forward end of the old man's canoe. Looking forward he saw a savage float out from under the prow of the boat—his arms beating the waves in the agonies of death. He had undoubtedly been concealed there when the borderman entered the boat, and was waiting an opportunity to dispatch the old scout, and would no doubt have succeeded but for the provident shot of—whom?

Lifting his eyes from the dying warrior, and glancing toward the shore he saw the unknown object floating back into the woods.

"By the holy smoke of Jerusalem!" he exclaimed, "that war the Silent Slayer, shur'n gully! But what for a mask did it wear? It beats the very Old Harry. Well, by Judas! I'll not land there, as anybody's aware of, so I'll push on up-stream a leetle fuder."

So saying he dipped his paddle, turned half-around and faced up-stream; but he soon realized that he was running a great risk, and so he crossed back to the northern shore. Once more within the shadows, he felt at ease and stopped to listen. He heard the dip of a paddle, and a moment later, a canoe with two occupants appeared in sight. They would pass hard by. As they came closer he saw that one was Sparrowhawk, and the other the Indian maiden, Nathelah. They were conversing in quite an audible tone. Arkansaw listened. Sparrowhawk was speaking:

"Yes, Nathelah," he was saying, "when Silver Star and I meet again, one or the other of us must die."

"Why does Sparrowhawk hate the Boy Knight?" the scout heard the maiden demand.

"Because he knows too much; he hates me."

"Is that all, Sparrowhawk?"

"Yes; it is enough! Do you think I would tell Nathelah, my betrothed, a falsehood?"

"Have you not told me how beautiful the white maiden is that you rescued from the river? Have you not told me how she talks of the young Silver Star? Do you not believe she loves the Boy Knight?"

"What if I did, Nathelah?" the lover asked.

"The heart of the pale-face is false and fickle sometimes," replied the girl, "and Sparrowhawk may learn to love another."

"Oh, my pretty darling," replied Sparrowhawk, lifting her hand to his lips, "I see you are jealous of the fair Elwe; but she will never take your place in my heart. I will send her away some day; but Silver Star shall never set eyes upon her again."

"By the lords of Ballyhoolan!" exclaimed Arkansaw, as the lovers passed beyond hearing; "that tells a tale. That young bastion has got Elwe in his power; and by the great John Rodgers! I'd give my interest in the moon if the Boy Knight was here now. Won't it pop a beam of joy into his heart, though, when I tell him that Elwe's alive? Judas! everything with him has been Elwe, Elwe, Elwe. Oh, but he's in love with her heels over head; and now I must look him up; then we'll spy the Sparrowhawk's nest out. And that Nathelah; now, Arkansaw, my old beauty, she's no more an Ingin girl than Sabina Bandy's an angel—not a bit of it. By hokey! I wonder if I'd slick up, and put my best hoof for'd, whether I couldn't cut that Sparrowhawk out?" and the plainsman laughed heartily at his own absurd conceit.

Again finding himself alone in the night, the old scout went ashore, pulled his canoe out of the water, and began looking for a place to pass the rest of the eventful night. He found a great hollow log hard by, and without a moment's hesitation he got down upon his knees, and having put his rifle in the log crawled into the hollow, and stretching himself out went to sleep.

When he awoke it was daylight, and without his narrow chamber he heard the carol of birds and the chatter of squirrels in the tree-tops; but, instead of the fresh morning air the pungent odor of smoke greeted his olfactories.

"By Judas Iskariot!" he exclaimed to himself, "that's a fire nigh this log, and I'll bet some red-skin bastions has got a camp about. It might be whites, but how the deuce 'm I to tell? I've got to back out of here, and them dasted long legs 'll let 'em know I'm coming long afore I git out with my topsail."

He listened and heard voices—voices of white men talking. Among them he recognized the voice of

Old Kit Bandy; but he could scarcely believe the evidences of his own senses, for he believed Bandy had been slain. While thinking the matter over, he discovered that the log was a continuous hollow; he could see out at the other end. This would enable him to make his exit forward, and at once he began creeping slowly along toward the opposite end. When within a few feet of the exit, a small hole in the side of the log enabled him to get a sight of those outside. Kit Bandy was there in all his old-time health and humor, and was being closely watched, in the operation of roasting some savory venison upon some hot coals, by two white men, both of whom were entire strangers to Old Arkansaw.

One of the strangers was rather an intelligent and prepossessing-looking man, but there was that about the drawn corners of the mouth and eyes, the clouded brow and nervous, restless movement of the body that did not, at all, impress the man in the hollow log very favorably. He was addressed by Kit and the other man as "Professor." The other stranger Arkansaw put down, at first glance, as a deep-dyed villain; and, judging by the manner in which Old Kit Bandy regarded him, it was also evident that he—Kit—had not a very good opinion of him.

The aroma of the broiling venison made Arkansaw's very mouth water, and sharpened his appetite until silence almost ceased to be a virtue. He crawled on until his head was within a foot of the exit, when he discovered half a dozen sticks thrust in the ground near the log with a slice of steaming hot venison cooling on the end of each.

Assured, by the run of conversation outside, that the eyes of the trio were not that way, Old Arkansaw reached out and removed the meat from the three nearest sticks and began eating it with a voracious appetite.

Presently he heard Kit Bandy say:

"Now, gentlemen, jist move yerselves up to the lick-block and try my style of dishin' up venison. I alers prided myself on gittin' more concentrated glory into a slice of broiled venison than—Great horn of Joshua! what in the stars 's become of that venison? I left a slice on each of them sticks, and as I'm a born nigger, three of them are gone! Reckon on a sneakin' dog of some Ingin did slip up and gobble 'em up."

"That's rather strange," said the man addressed as professor; "a dog couldn't have come here unseen."

"Strange, indeed," added the other man, Herman Braash.

"Not a bit of it, by the roarin' Hellispoint!" exclaimed old Kit, as he saw a large, bony hand thrust from the hollow log, and deliberately remove another slice of venison from a stick; "that tells the tale! Did you see that infernal tentacle of a human Octophus snake in another piece of our breakfast? That log, men, is infested."

"What accursed impudence!" said Professor Daymon.

"Shoot the skulking hound!" vociferated Braash. The professor drew his revolver, while old Kit, bending over, gazed into the log. The eyes of the latter met those of Old Arkansaw, when a roar of laughter burst from the lips of the scout.

"Great horn that floored old Jericho!" exclaimed Kit; "it's that pizen old vagabone, Arkansaw Abe! Come out of there, you dasted, ornery old baboon, and let me maul the stuffin' out of you! Oh, but I'll abolish you, my gay old buttercup!"

Old Arkansaw crept from his covert, and bowing to the astonished trio, said "Good-morning," and then seating himself upon the log, drew his hunting-knife and began picking his teeth in a manner that equaled all the cool impudence they had ever witnessed. To add to the surprise of the trio, he turned to Bandy and said:

"That venison's a leetle stringy—done most too rare for me."

"You blasted old rascal!" replied Kit, "that's all purty well done, but it's only borrowed, now mind. But look here, Arky, this gentleman is Professor Daymon, and this Mr. Herman Braash; and then this, gentlemen, is Old Arkansaw Abe, the nuisance of the White Earth, confound his ornery pieter!"

Arkansaw bowed politely to the two men; and notwithstanding the language in which the introduction was given, Daymon and Braash both addressed the old plainsman with apparent surprise and no little respect. After a few words the four sat down to breakfast, and when their meal had been concluded, Braash and Daymon walked out into the woods, promising to return in a few minutes.

As soon as they were out of sight, Old Arkansaw turned to Bandy and said:

"Kitsie, my rosebud of beauty, and paragon of loveliness, do you know who you're keepin' company with?"

"Why, yes; Herman Braash, civil engineer and government surveyor, and Professor Daymon, scientific man of the expedition."

"How do you know, Kit?"

"They said so."

"Would you b'lieve I war an angel if I war to say so?"

"Not by a thunderated sight, Arky," replied Bandy. "They said their company had encamped up the river last night; and durin' the night they concluded to make a reconnoissance down toward the Ingin town, and got lost. Meetin' me, they concluded to stick by me till this mornin'."

"Well, it may all be, Kitsie; but I'll swar the government selected some mighty dubious-lookin' men to make geography for our school-children."

"Ya-as, that's what I think; I didn't like the looks of Braash from the fust—looks a mortal sight like Old Arkansaw Abe—only better lookin'." But I pro-

mised to go up to their camp to-day, and then I can see whether they're surveyors or frauds."

"I'll tell ye what I think, Bandy: that is, you won't see Surveyor Braash and Skienflintic Daymon back here ag'in this day. I think you've had the wool yanked over your full, lustrous orbs."

"Well, what makes you think so?" asked Bandy, beginning to betray some uneasiness.

"Gineral appearances, Kitsie. Surveyor Braash has a down, furtive look like a wolf; and Skienflintic Daymon has the quick, restless eye of a guilty conscience."

"Complimentary to the country's servants," said Bandy; "but for fear you are right, Arky, I'll keep a look-out for them. They may be wanted afore long, and—"

"Yes, and please the gracious, you're wanted now, Kit Bandy!" cried a sharp, shrill voice, and the next moment Sabina Bandy came bounding from the woods and confronted her recreant and ungrateful husband.

Kit, with a look of utter hopelessness, stood at bay.

CHAPTER XI.

"FARE THEE WELL, AND IF FOREVER," ETC.

"AGAIN, oh, you demon of an old rascal!" hissed old Sabina, shaking her big umbrella in Kit's face, and fairly dancing in her excitement. "Again have I found you! again do I stand face to face with my cruel husband."

"Yes, Lord, Lord!" sighed Kit, withering like a coward before the blazing eyes and uplifted weapon of his enraged wife.

"Please gracious," the old woman went on, poking him unmercifully in the ribs with her umbrella, this is the last time that you desert me alive; and you may depend upon that!"

"We could live just as harpily, Sabina, a thousand miles apart," observed Kit.

"You could, but I couldn't. My youth and beauty and freshness is gone, and—"

"And where in God's name is mine? Hasn't it been deviled out of—"

"Wait, will you?" interrupted Sabina, "please gracious I have the floor. A man is so deceitful that he can make a young gal b'lieve he's a giddy boy, and who knows but you're carryin' on a flirtation with some gal now?"

"I am not, 'Bina."

"I wouldn't b'lieve you as fur as I could throw a buffalo-bull by the tail," stormed the wife.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" exclaimed Old Arkansaw to himself; "the jee of Old Kit Bandy sparkin' a girl! I swan that's good—dee-licious."

While the husband and wife were talking matters over in a rather stormy way, as we have seen, Arkansaw took his rifle and walking down to the river seated himself in the canoe he had left there the night before with the intention of crossing to the opposite shore as soon as he had an opportunity to bid Kit good-by.

"Kit," he finally said, "when you've time between breaths I'd like to speak a word to you—bid you good-by and wish you years of conjugal happiness."

Kit gave a sad, longing glance toward the river, and then, as a thought seemed to flash through his mind, he turned suddenly, and tearing himself from the embrace of his wife, darted away toward the stream at the top of his speed, Sabina after him. Reaching the beach, the old man made a leap and landed squarely in the center of Arkansaw's canoe, and with such force that the boat was driven half-across the river with great velocity. Old Kit fell sprawling in the boat, but rising to a sitting posture, he glanced back at the shore and saw his enraged wife standing at the water's edge, shaking her umbrella in a furious manner, and fairly frothing with anger. With a wave of his hand, the old man shouted back:

"Fare thee well, Sabina, and if forever, Still forever, fare thee well."

Sabina could make no reply. Her form shook with the intensity of her emotions.

At this juncture the sharp blast of a horn came leaping from out the forest, starting all with surprise.

"By the horn that fetched old Jericho!" exclaimed Kit, "that come from the direction in which Braash and Daymon went. It means mischief, I'm afraid—pull for the shore, Arky, pull lively!"

"But your wife, man! would you leave her to—"

"Never mind the old catamount; she'll scratch her way through. See that? Oh, horn of Joshua! but she is an ingenious critter!"

Old Arkansaw looked back as requested, and to his wonder and surprise, saw that Sabina had raised her big umbrella—a monstrous large affair—and, inverting it, had placed it upon the water, and had embarked in it for across the river, paddling with her hands!

In other words, the little old woman had made a canoe out of her large old umbrella, and, although the current was gradually bearing her down-stream, was slowly crossing in pursuit of Kit Bandy.

"I'll be everlastingly confused, Kit!" exclaimed Arkansaw, "who ever heard o' the like afore? An umbril for a canoe. Why, man, it'll sink and drown her!"

"The Lord's will be done, Arky."

"You old sinner, I'd ort to shoot you— Oh!"

A bullet from the woods on the opposite shore cut a lock of hair from the old plainsman's head, and forced a groan from his lips.

"Ingins or surveyors!" he exclaimed, and then plied his paddle with all his strength. A few strokes of the blade brought them to the shore, and, landing, they sought the cover of the woods from whence they watched the opposite side.

CHAPTER XII.

A MUTUAL FRIENDSHIP.

We left Silver Star alone in the night and the forest pursuing his way toward the White Earth river. Again had the youth been thrown upon his own resources, though he was wounded and unarmed. But he possessed a resolute spirit, and with never a thought of giving up he pressed boldly on. Reaching the river he sat down at the water's edge and bathed his burning wound; and then dipping some water in the hollow of his hand slaked his feverish thirst. This done he crept back into the woods and raking a pile of dry leaves together burrowed himself therein and went to sleep.

When the boy awoke it was morning—broad daylight. The mellow-throated birds were warbling their matin songs above him, while a hundred voices of the young day made the cool, fresh air resonant with their weird, droning music.

Rising from his couch, the Boy Knight shook the leaves from his body, and then going down to the river dressed his wounded ankle and made a thorough ablution of his hands and face. He felt greatly refreshed by this exhilarating treatment; but still he was weak and feverish. Could he have set down to just such a meal as his appetite craved he felt that he would soon be his own self again. But, food was denied him, and hungry and sore he crept back into the brush fringing the shore, and leaning against a log, gave way to reflections. Again White Crane, the Mysterious Chief, the Silent Slayer, the balloon, the fair Elwe, Old Arkansaw and Kit Bandy passed in silent review before his mental vision.

A slight noise in the bushes to his right arrested his attention. He listened and heard something dragging itself through the shrubbery. Was it a savage creeping upon him? The question gave him great uneasiness. He rose to his feet and peering through an opening in the bushes saw the cause of the sound. It was an Indian crawling upon his hands and knees—a young warrior. He was covered with blood, and his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks told that he was wounded nigh unto death. At his back was a quiver filled with red and black-feathered arrows. In his hand he carried an unstrung bow.

Somewhere Silver Star had seen this Indian, and it was full a minute before he could recall the fact that he was one of his captors of the previous night—one of the three shot down by an unseen foe.

The boy felt no fear of the savage, for he saw that he was past doing him harm.

The Indian crept down to the water's edge, and lying down, drank as if he had been dying with thirst. Stopping a moment for breath, he drank again and then again; and as he turned away, he looked at the river as if with regret that he could not drink it dry. Leaving the water, he crept back directly toward the white boy, who now felt a sense of fear stealing over him.

In a moment his eyes had met those of the wounded warrior.

The latter started excitedly and laid his hand upon his breast. Silver Star knew what this meant—friendship. Responding in a similar manner, the youth at once addressed him in the Sioux dialect.

"The Sioux brave is wounded like the Silver Star."

"The Weasel will die," the Indian replied in his own language, which we translate.

"Mebby not, red-skin," encouraged the young knight.

"Yes," persisted the Indian, "the blood of the Weasel has reddened the ground where he fell by the bullet of the terrible Silent Slayer."

"We've been unfortunate, red-skin, though I believe you've got the worst of it. Last night I was your captive, and to-day I could make you mine."

"Here is my bow, and in my quiver is an arrow. The Weasel will sing the praises of the Silver Star in the happy hunting-grounds if he will end his misery."

"No, no, red-skin, I can't kill you now. If you were not down and helpless, I'd kill you quick enough. But the Boy Knight is not a coward. He will not strike an enemy when he is down by the hand of another. You need not fear me, red-skin."

The Indian looked the gratitude he could not express in language, and creeping closer to the young knight, sank down upon the earth with sheer exhaustion. Presently, however, he rallied, and rising to a sitting posture, dragged himself forward and leaned against the log at Silver Star's right.

And there, side by side, those two wounded enemies sat through all that long day, talking in the kindest manner and lamenting their condition in mutual friendship.

Silver Star bound up the red-skin's wound from which there had been a slow leaking away of his life-blood, drop by drop, ever since he had been wounded. This treatment seemed to give the Indian courage, and his reviving hopes brought strength; but it was some time before he had strength enough to stand.

Hunger now began to tell upon the wounded youths, but there seemed no prospect of relief from this trouble. Already the shadows of night were deepening in the forest and stretching across the river. Nocturnal voices began their melancholy song; the night-hawk's wings pounded the silent air overhead; velvet-footed animals crept softly through the woods; rabbits glided from their lairs and were playing in and out of the moonlight along the beach like weaver's shuttles—pausing, now and then, within twenty feet of the wounded youths.

"Weasel, let me take your bow and arrow," said Silver Star, as a rabbit stopped in front of him and reared upon its hind feet and gave utterance to a

queer noise that sounded like mockery to the ears of our hero.

The Indian gave him the bow and arrow, and stringing the bow, he placed an arrow against the string, and then awaited his chances for a shot. He had not long to wait. A big-eyed rabbit came bounding from the shadows and stood up before him on the beach. The lad raised the bow and drew the arrow to the head. There was a "thrum," a cry, and the animal lay struggling upon the shore.

"Good shot," murmured the Indian.

Silver Star crept out and securing the animal, returned to the Indian and asked him for his knife. Cutting the rabbit's throat, he passed it to the Weasel and said:

"Drink the blood, red-skin; it will do you good."

The young warrior eagerly seized the animal, and applying his lips to the wound, sucked the hot blood from every vein in its body. This nourishment gave him new life. It threw a new lustre into his dark eyes, and infused new strength into his body. It seemed as though he were starting from a helpless dream, so greatly was he revived by the rabbit's blood. He felt so strong that he took his bow and shot another rabbit. The blood of this one Silver Star drank. A third rabbit was killed and dressed and the meat devoured raw.

This unexpected delivery from the pangs of hunger gave the youths new hope. They felt so greatly invigorated that they finally began to think and talk of departing. They still maintained the utmost friendship, and seemed to take a mutual interest in each other's welfare. But the time for parting finally came. Rising to their feet, they walked down to the beach.

"Good-by, Weasel," said Silver Star, "I hope you may get home safe."

"Foes can be much good friends, sometimes," was the Indian's reply, given with a grateful look.

Thus they parted. Silver Star turned his back upon the Indian and started down the river. He had gone but a short distance when the murderous "whiz" of an arrow crossed his ears. At the same instant, almost, he saw the feathered weapon strike into the white sandy beach before him, the shaft leaning back toward him, telling from whence it came.

It had been fired at him from behind. Of this there was not a single doubt. Neither was there a doubt in his mind that the Weasel had fired it—that the red-skin, obeying the instinct of his treacherous nature, had attempted to murder him.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRUE UNTO DEATH.

SILVER STAR turned quickly around, his very heart rankling with rage and indignation at the treachery of him whose life he had been instrumental in saving. He saw the Indian standing where he had left him in the very act of firing another arrow; but, seeing him turn, he lowered the weapon and began gesticulating in a violent manner. He pointed up the river as if trying to call the boy's attention that way.

Looking beyond the Indian, Silver Star saw a canoe with two occupants coming down the stream. This told him that he had accused the red-skin wrongfully—that the arrow had only been fired to call his attention without giving an alarm. Hastening back to the Indian the latter said, in a low, excited tone:

"Blackfeet scouts! Sioux enemies! Blackfeet bad Ingins—been scout round Sioux village—killum—scalpum!"

Both Silver Star and the Sioux were surprised at the presence of Blackfeet Indians there, such a long way from their own grounds. In fact, the boy scout could hardly credit the fact of their being Blackfeet; but he saw that all the savage nature of his companion was aroused by the presence of these ancient foes—that he seemed suddenly possessed of all the strength and combative spirit he ever had. He drew Silver Star into the bushes, and then with fixed, glaring eyes, and his weak and almost bloodless frame aquiver with emotion, he waited and watched the motions of the two Blackfeet.

The latter crept along the shore in the moonlight, their paddles creating no sound whatever. They were nearly opposite the Sioux and Silver Star, when, to the surprise of the latter, the Weasel began uttering a series of strange sounds that did not fail to reach the ears of the Blackfeet.

What did it mean? Was there treachery in this? Silver Star had seen so much treachery in the Indians that he could not fully trust any of them. He had only the Weasel's word for the two Indians being Blackfeet. He could not, situated as he was, tell them from any other Indians, and he thought it might be such a thing that the Weasel was calling to friends for assistance; and his suspicions became all the stronger when he saw the boat turn and make directly toward them.

"Weasel," he asked, no longer able to keep silent, "how do you know them are Blackfeet?"

Weasel made no reply, but, with a slight frown, bent forward, his eyes fixed upon the canoe; he stood silent and motionless as a statue with an arrow to his bow and half drawn.

The Boy Knight would have repeated his question had the Indians not reached the shore and landed, and had he not seen that they were Blackfeet, beyond a single doubt.

And as to the Weasel's honor, the "thrum" of a bowstring and a yell of agony bore ample evidence; for the Sioux sent an arrow deep into the breast of one of the Blackfoot braves; and before the other could tell whence the missile came, he, too, received one of the barbed weapons in his throat.

Neither of the warriors fell, but reeling upon the beach and tearing madly at the arrow-shafts, uttered the most horrible and agonized screams. Silver Star shuddered.

"Weasel," he said, "you had better have let them gone on; you've only wounded them, and their cries may bring others, if others are about."

"They die soon—red arrow poison—white arrow not," replied Weasel.

Again the boy shuddered, and wondered at the cool and awful bloodthirstiness of the wounded Weasel, and the superhuman strength with which the spirit of vengeance had endowed him.

The Blackfoot shot in the neck fell first. He ceased his cries and frantic efforts to draw the arrow and sunk down lifeless. The other, as if being consumed by fire, plunged into the river and was seen no more.

With a glow of demoniac triumph upon his face Weasel crept out of the thicket, scalped the Blackfoot, rifled him of trinkets and jewelry, and then stepping into his fallen foe's canoe, said:

"Come, pale-face—go in Blackfoot boat—Weasel go with you."

All distrust had now vanished, and stepping into the canoe they pushed out from the shore and drifted down the stream. In the boat were the Indians' blankets, one of which Silver Star wrapped about him to keep off the damp, chill air.

When out in the river under the moonlight the Sioux began itemizing the booty he had secured in his victory over the Blackfeet. Silver Star watched him handle the bloody scalp and some jewelry and look them over with a childlike curiosity.

A little cry of surprise suddenly burst from the red-skin's lips. He had found something that excited his curiosity. He looked it over and over and then passed it to Silver Star. It was a gold locket. The lad pressed the spring and it flew open. There was a picture inside. He held it up closer to his eyes. It was his turn now to be surprised. He recognized the face therein. It was the face of Elwe, the heroine of the balloon. Of this there was not a single doubt in his mind, but it was a serious question how it had come in the Blackfoot's possession, unless Elwe had fallen into his power.

The thought that such might be the case gave him pain; but he no longer reflected upon it, for a dark object—a clump of drifting brush—suddenly parted by the side of the canoe, and three Blackfoot Indians, with yells that rung fearfully through the night, attacked the canoe.

The Boy Knight dropped the locket in his sudden fright.

The Sioux warrior gave the war-cry of his tribe, and seizing the paddle at his feet swung it aloft and brought it down upon the tufted head of a Blackfoot, stunning him and causing him to release his hold upon the boat.

At the same instant Silver Star received a blow on the head from behind that felled him, half-stunned, in the bottom of the boat. He was rendered helpless, motionless by the blow; and yet he had consciousness enough left to realize, in a vague sort of way, the danger that menaced him and his companion. He could hear the far-off sound of a struggle going on around him, and he could see dim, shadowy figures passing and whirling and bowing before him like the figures in a panorama. The sounds he heard finally changed into a deep, dull roar, like the fall of distant water, and the figures before him disappeared. He experienced a vague sense of his situation and tried to shake off the terrible spell. But every effort seemed to add new weight to the powerful demon that was crushing him to death. He seemed to be smothering, and a bloody mist gathering over his eyes. The roar in his ears became as music, and his soul appeared to be drifting away into darkness. At last he passed away into oblivion. He had become totally unconscious.

Silently and prostrate he lay in the boat until finally he awoke as if from a sleep. He arose to a sitting posture and gazed in bewilderment around him—up at the sky and down at the silent waters. Everything seemed blended in one confused mass, but gradually objects began to unfold themselves to the eye. One by one he began to recall the events of the past. The moon, the stars, the rippling waters and the moaning forest all aided his clouded senses.

Then a cry escapes his lips.

All at once the past comes, like a flash, upon his brain. He saw that he was still in the Blackfoot canoe. Before and around him was horrible evidence of the result of the conflict with the three redskins. Just in front of him, and with his body hanging half-out of the canoe, lay Weasel—dead. His fingers were clutched with the icy gripe of death in the hair of one of the Blackfeet, whose body was in the water, and whose fingers of the right hand were fastened upon the throat of the Sioux. In this way the two bitter foes had died.

The shock was terrible to the already overtaxed nerves of the Boy Knight, and it required his utmost effort to overcome a feeling of total despondency. But, determined not to give up, he crept to the body of the Sioux, and lifting it in his arms, consigned it to a watery grave. This effort well-nigh overtaxed his strength and he was compelled to lie down again.

The canoe was lodged in some driftwood, and as the lad had not the strength to manage it, he concluded to remain there until morning, whatever the result might be.

As he lay there with the water rippling around him and imparting a gentle, swaying motion to the boat, a feeling of drowsiness came upon him. He tried hard to dispel it, but the fatigues of the past two days and nights, and the effect of the blow received upon the head, seemed to dull his senses, and hang like weights upon his eyelids; and despite

his efforts, he finally sunk into a profound and refreshing slumber.

How long he slept he knew not, but when he awoke, it was some time before he could recall his situation. But when he did, he became aware of the startling fact that he was moving—that his boat was gliding along through a narrow black channel among rustling reeds and grass.

Spellbound by this discovery he lay perfectly quiet—scarcely daring to move or breathe, through fear; for in connection with the discovery that his boat was moving, he could hear the steady dip, dip of a paddle.

A deep, dense darkness overhung the face of all nature. The moon had gone down, and even the stars were shut out behind the blue mist that obscured the heavens. Not the sign of a tree-top was visible over the sides of the canoe, which was evidence enough to the lad that he was not upon the river. But, now and then the edges of the boat raked under some overhanging reeds whose rough blades dragged over the youth's face. This told him that he was moving through a swamp, and the discovery sent a strange shudder through his form. He knew there was but one swamp in all the region thereabouts, and that one was known as the Spirit Swamp. It was a black, dismal place where it seemed impossible for human life to exist—for human feet to penetrate. Indian tradition habited the place with the spirits of white hunters that dwelt within the bodies of dragons and hideous, deadly serpents; and the red-skins around and about the swamp scarcely ever ventured within gun-shot of its margin.

Silver Star believed that he was either dreaming, or else passing through the Spirit Swamp, and to satisfy himself that he was not passing through a state of transition, he rose to a sitting posture, determined to meet the worst.

To his horror and surprise he found there was no one in the canoe with him, nor was any one visible around him; yet his boat was moving—gliding steadily along the narrow, watery path—winding like a serpent among the rustling reeds of the Spirit Swamp.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELICE.

SILVER STAR was in a quandary. He asked himself these questions: "What does this mean? from whence does this boat receive its motive power?"

Unable to arrive at anything like a definite conclusion the young knight remained perfectly quiet, and finally discovered that there was a boat just ahead of him, and that it had his canoe in tow. But, who was the occupant of that strange boat? This was another question that agitated his mind.

On with light and steady strokes of the paddle the boats glided through the rustling reeds.

A few minutes later they emerged into open water, and then Silver Star was enabled to distinguish the outlines of the canoe before him, and those of the person in it. It was a small figure.

A few rods further on the tow-boat came to a halt, then the hinder craft was hauled up alongside the other, when a cry of surprise burst from the lips of the unknown.

"Why, sir, I thought you were dying. I am surprised at seeing you sitting up."

It was a soft, musical voice that addressed him—the voice of a young girl. Silver Star's heart gave a great bound of joy.

"My fair, strange friend, if I may call you such," the youth replied, "I am surprised to find myself here in an unknown region."

"No doubt of it," was the answer; "but you are in the heart of the Spirit Swamp."

"I mistrusted as much," he answered, endeavoring to calm his emotion; "but may I ask who has brought me here?"

"A friend to you whom I recognize as Silver Star, the Boy Knight; I have seen you often though you knew it not. To-night I found you on the river covered with blood and dying, as I supposed, and so I brought you here."

"I am wounded and suffering great pain, fair stranger."

"You shall be cared for, Silver Star, upon one condition."

"Name it, my good friend."

"That you consent to remain concealed where I place you."

"I should be ungrateful not to do so, but I am at a loss to know why you exact this promise."

"Because the master of my home—my brother—is your mortal enemy."

"Indeed? I knew not that I had an enemy among the people of my own race."

"That may be; but Sparrowhawk, the recluse, is your enemy."

The Boy Knight was astounded by this information.

"Then Sparrowhawk is your brother," he said, thoughtfully.

"Ah! then you know him?"

"Yes; I met him just last night, and he would have slain me then but for another. But, why he is my enemy I know not, unless he is, as I mistrusted last night."

"Sh! Silver Star!" interrupted the girl, "I know what you would say; but do not say it—do not think that my brother is—but come; if you would accept my protection, follow me. Brother is gone away."

The girl arose, stepped from her canoe, and was followed by the boy, who could scarcely walk. The maiden led him across a dry knoll densely covered with tall willows. They soon came to the door of a low, wide hut overgrown with ivy and honeysuckle. Opening the door, the girl conducted her guest into the house, and groping around she found a stool and bade him be seated.

The next minute a light flooded the room.

For several moments the dazzling light blinded the lad's eyes, but when he became accustomed to it, surprise and wonder took possession of him. The girl before him—his rescuer—could not have been over seventeen years of age. She was tall and slender, with a form of sylph-like grace and beauty, a face of exceeding loveliness, and dark-blue eyes radiant with heaven's own serenity.

The room, which was but a part of the cabin, was furnished with an air of comfort and taste in perfect harmony with the fair mistress of that secluded home. It is true, the furniture was cheap, but neat and clean. The walls were hung with pictures, and with wreaths made of wild grasses and vines. Here was a shelf upon which sat a bouquet of fall roses and other late flowers, that imparted a delicious odor to the room; and there hung a cornucopia, made of pine cones and glittering quartz, that was overflowing with its fullness of fruits and flowers.

"Now, Silver Star," said the maiden, "you must make yourself as comfortable as possible. Situated as we are, our home is not—"

"Make no apologies to me, my fair friend," interrupted the lad. "I know what you would say, and I am surprised, now, at the comforts and beauty of your home;" and in his heart he added: "the angelic loveliness of its mistress."

After a few words of conversation had passed between them, the maiden excused herself, and went out into an adjoining room; and, a moment later, Silver Star heard her in conversation with some other person.

The youth listened intently—not that he wished to be inquisitive, but because he could not resist the burning desire to know more of the home of the strange Sparrowhawk, and ascertain, if possible, the cause of his great enmity toward him.

The maiden had been gone but a few minutes, when she returned to the room, followed by another young girl.

Silver Star's back was to the door when they entered, and he did not notice the second girl, only with a passing glance, until his friend said:

"Silver Star, this is my friend, Miss Bland."

Silver Star rose and turned toward the girl—a young maiden dressed in black, with a face white as alabaster and beautiful as an angel's, with dark, soulful eyes and a wealth of dark-brown hair. At sight of her the youth started back; a light of recognition overspread his face, and his feelings breaking beyond restraint, he exclaimed:

"By gracious, it's Elwe!"

"Yes, my brave young friend," replied the girl.

The boy advanced, and taking the proffered hand, pressed it warmly, while his eyes looked down into hers with a wild, burning joy. A moment of rapturous silence ensued.

"And you escaped safely?" he said, as if doubting his senses.

"Yes, sir," replied Elwe, "and I am rejoiced to meet you and thank you for your noble kindness to me the other night. I should never have forgiven myself had any thing happened you that night."

"But your escape, Elwe, has been a matter of uncertainty to me until this moment. My horse came through to the post safely, but without a rider. We all supposed you dead."

"Oh, that was an awful ride, Silver Star!" the maiden replied, clasping her hand as if with terror at the thoughts of what she had gone through; "I stood it very well, and so did Prince, but when I came to the river, my heart failed, my head grew dizzy at sight of the rushing waters, and I fell from the saddle. Then I knew no more until I found myself in this house. Fortunately, for me, Sparrowhawk was near, and seeing me fall from my horse, rescued me; and that accounts for my presence here."

"Exactly, Elwe; and now I understand the meaning of a conversation I overheard at Deep Ford a few evenings ago; but, I declare, you and I have had some terrible adventures."

"And the Lord only knows how soon we may have others," the maiden sighed.

"Oh, I never borrow trouble, Elwe. We should always consider the worst over with, unless we are positive that it is not. With you it may be different, it is true, for I know you have been the victim of some foul conspiracy."

"Yes, Silver Star, I have," she replied, her lips trembling and her eyes filling with tears; "I did not tell you all the other night—I did not tell you anything, I believe, for the Indians swept down upon us just as I was about to begin. But to-morrow, Silver Star, I will tell you all I know about the balloon, and my presence here. I told Hellice all to-day."

"Hellice? who is Hellice?"

"The good, kind girl that brought you here."

"Oh, I beg pardon; I might have guessed that much."

At this very juncture Hellice came in from the adjoining room, and invited Silver Star out to supper.

Expressing his thankfulness to the beautiful girl for her continued kindness, he followed her out into the room where a table, with a rich repast and a bowl of steaming coffee was spread. He sat down and ate with a keen relish of the well-cooked viands, and when he had concluded his meal, felt that he was himself again—that, with the exception of his wounded ankle, all his old-time vigor and spirit had been revived.

With his usual cheerfulness and happy, boyish spirit, he conversed with his fair friends until bedtime. But when about to retire, he turned to Hellice and asked:

"Hellice, if your brother is my mortal enemy am I not in danger here to-night?"

"No, Silver Star; Sparrowhawk will be absent; but even if he, or any other danger, should approach, there is an ever-watchful sentinel in the house that will give the alarm. I hope you will let no thought of danger disturb your rest, for again I assure you brother will not be home for two or three days."

With this assurance the lad retired, and enjoyed a few hours' sweet, refreshing slumber.

Early the next morning he was astir. He walked out into the yard to take a look at the surroundings. He found that the cabin stood upon a little knoll which rose out of the center of the swamp, several feet above the water-line. The knoll was covered with tall cottonwoods and willows, in the tops of which tame squirrels played and chattered in glee.

Breakfast was finally announced by Hellice, who seemed more lovely in her morning dress, and in the light of day, than she had before.

After their meal had been dispatched and the table cleared away, the maidens joined Silver Star in his walks about the island, and did everything in their power to make him happy. In fact, there was a spirit of gentle rivalry manifested by these two beautiful girls in their endeavors to make the youth feel at ease and enjoy his sojourn upon the island. To Silver Star the day was one of unalloyed bliss. Basking in the smiles of the two lovely girls, he felt that he was surrounded with all the inspirations of fairy-land—transported to an enchanted isle. It was such a day of pleasure and intoxicating joy that he could scarcely have believed it reality, had it not been for the dull haze of autumn hanging over them and the eternal croak of frogs in the swamp surrounding them.

When night again closed in over the place, and the Boy Knight found himself wandering alone under the trees, his thoughts ran constantly over the pleasant, happy words of Hellice and Elwe—words that had been spoken that day, and appealed to his heart. He tried to decide with himself which of the girls was the loveliest, and which he thought the most of, but as he could not decide, he finally dismissed the matter with the conclusion that both were angels and that he loved both.

An hour or so after dark his ears were greeted by the sound of music coming from the cabin, and going in he found Hellice playing upon a Spanish guitar and singing some beautiful airs he had never heard. Elwe sung with her, and the strains of music that came from their lips, mingled with the harmonious chords of the instrument, were the crowning joy of the boy's life. His senses swam in a sea of ecstasy and bliss, and he seemed carried away on the dulcet wings of melody into the realms of dream-land.

The soft tinkle of a silver-throated bell suspended to a beam overhead suddenly put an end to the music. Hellice sprang to her feet, dropped the guitar, and with a white face ran to the door, and opening it, looked out into the night.

She heard some one coming up the knoll, whistling softly.

"It is brother!—Sparrowhawk!" she exclaimed, turning to Silver Star. "Oh, Silver Star, you must flee! brother will kill you—he has declared he would!"

It was a sudden change from dreamland to stern reality.

The maidens' faces grew pale and their lips tremulous with emotion. Silver Star rose to his feet unmoved—betraying no sign of fear.

"Follow me," Hellice commanded, and she led the way into the kitchen, and then pointed him to the head of a ladder leading into the cellar. "Go, Silver Star," she continued: "it is your only chance of escape."

"Hellice," the boy said, his manly spirit asserting its wonted courage, "I am not afraid to meet your brother."

"I know it, Silver Star; but he is impulsive—he is quick, and may shoot you before he takes a moment to think; you must go, Silver Star—go for me—for my sake, I pray."

The young scout could not remain deaf to this appeal, however much he felt humiliated at the thought of skulking in his enemy's cellar; and so he descended the ladder into the darkness of the place. Hellice returned to the front door just as her brother came in.

"Good-evening, girls," he said, doffing his feathered cap.

"Why, brother," cried Hellice; "we are surprised to see you back to-night."

"I know I am back soon, as I intended, but I became uneasy about my—"

"You are very good and kind, Sparrowhawk," said the pretty little Elwe, gratefully.

"Thanks for the compliment, Elwe," the young recluse returned, his handsome eyes looking down through the maiden's transparent orbs into her soul.

"Why were you uneasy, brother?" questioned Hellice; "are we in any more danger than usual?"

"Yes; there is a large band of Blackfoot Indians in the vicinity, and as they belong two hundred or more miles from here, they may not know any thing of the old tradition connected with Spirit Swamp, and with nothing to fear in shape of spirits and dragons, conclude to search this swamp, in which case our home would be in danger. Knowing this, I could not stay away. Moreover, I was uneasy about you, sister. I was so afraid that you might have met with danger in coming home after accompanying me to the river, I could not rest; and this was another thing that drove me home."

"I got home safely, and in good season," said Hellice.

Sparrowhawk bent his gaze upon his sister's face with a strange, interrogative look. A great lump rose in his throat, for she had never seen her

brother look so before, and she believed he mistrusted something of the truth.

"Sister," he finally said, in a sterner tone than that with which he usually addressed her, "how came those strange canoes at our landing? and who came in them?"

"Do you mistrust me, brother?" the maiden asked, evasively.

"That does not answer my question, Hellice," he replied, with a faint smile playing over his stern features.

"I brought one canoe there," she said, "and only one. I found it upon the river soon after leaving you last night."

"But who was in it, Hellice, tell me that?" the brother persisted most cruelly.

"Brother," she said, her face flushed and her eyes flashing, "I have no desire to tell you a falsehood. After leaving you last night I found that canoe on the river, and in it dying, as I supposed, was a young boy—"

"Silver Star!" exclaimed the brother laying his hand upon his revolver. "Was it Silver Star?"

"It was Silver Star," she answered, fearlessly.

"Then, Hellice, his blood will be upon your head; you know what I have told you—"

"Brother," said Hellice, pleadingly, "do you forget that—"

"That you love Silver Star? no; but I have sworn that—"

His words were here cut short by the sound of footsteps, and turning, he found himself face to face with the object of his anger, Silver Star, who had appeared from the adjoining room.

"Sparrowhawk," the young man exclaimed, "if you want the life your sister saved, take it. I am here to answer for myself. I am not a coward."

"Silver Star," replied the desperate Sparrowhawk, "I told you but a few nights ago that when we met again it would be as enemies. I am not a man that trifles. Again do I meet you unarmed; but I will take no advantage of you. Here, take one of my revolvers, and follow me into the yard."

Silver Star took the weapon. A cry burst from the lips of Hellice and Elwe.

Sparrowhawk turned to the door, but at the same instant there came a sharp, violent knock against it that caused the recluse to start back with terror.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "they have found us! Oh, my sister, and my little friend, Elwe, we are doomed!"

He heard the sound of voices without, and before he could shoot the door-bolt, the door swung open and a savage—a Blackfoot warrior hideous in war-paint—crossed the threshold.

Beyond him, in the moonlight, Sparrowhawk could see other painted faces and plumed heads.

CHAPTER XV. MOMENTS OF TERROR.

"Ugh!" was the ejaculation of the red-skin, as he glided into the room and shot his black, snakish eyes about, permitting them to rest upon the white, terrified face of the fair Hellice.

"Red-skin!" exclaimed Sparrowhawk, "why do you intrude here in the Spirit Swamp?"

"Come git scalps—purty squaws—heap lubly," was the answer given in English, such as it was.

The eyes of Sparrowhawk fairly blazed. The ferocity of a demon and the desperation of a madman became set upon his handsome, manly face. The very muscles of his face and neck seemed to contract into hard knots, while his whole person seemed surrounded with a nimbus of superhuman power.

"Red-skin, you and I are not enemies—we are strangers," he said, in measured accents; "but come another step, and you shall die."

The savage laid his hand upon his tomahawk, and feeling secure in the presence of his friends, he straightened himself up to his full height and took a short step forward.

The next instant he fell dead—shot through the brain.

Without rose a fierce, savage yell, but before another Blackfoot could enter, Silver Star sprung forward and slammed the door shut and bolted it.

Again the savages tore the night with their yells, and the blows of tomahawks fell thick and fast upon the door—a frail barricade to long resist such an assault.

Sparrowhawk saw the door must soon yield. In silent terror, and with a burning humiliation, he turned to Silver Star. He glanced at the fearless young scout, then at Hellice and Elwe. The light in his eye had changed. His spirit was unbending.

A silence had now seized upon the besieged. Thick and rattling fell the blows upon the door—blows that seemed to awaken echoes in the chambers of Sparrowhawk's soul.

"Silver Star," the young recluse finally said, "if you can, I beg of you to forgive me. I have wronged you. Death stares us all in the face."

"I hold no malice—no ill-will toward you, Sparrowhawk," was the truly noble reply.

The two clasped hands and were friends.

A cry of joy burst from the lips of the maidens.

"Hellice, you and Elwe go into the back room—hide in the cellar," said Sparrowhawk; then turning to the young scout, continued: "Silver Star, do you think there is any hope?"

"God only knows; but we cannot die in a better cause than in defending those innocent girls."

"Never, Silver Star, never—Ah! the door is yielding! look out!"

Sparrowhawk blew out the light as the door burst in. Darkness filled the room and concealed the defenders; but they could see the shadowy forms of the savages against the moonlight outside.

The revolver that Sparrowhawk would have raised

against Silver Star now opened its deadly fire upon the yelling fiends. Side by side the two, Sparrowhawk and Silver Star, stood dealing death to the advancing foe. Over the Spirit Swamp, the first time, perhaps, since creation's morn, rung the din of conflict.

But such an uneven contest was not to last long. The revolvers of the defenders would soon be empty.

Sparrowhawk finally seized his companion by the arm, and drawing him into the back room, closed and barred the partition door.

The savages, a dozen strong, poured into the front room.

"While they are pounding away at this door, must try and escape," said Sparrowhawk; "con Silver Star, let us join the girls in the cellar."

The two descended the ladder into the cellar, where the girls stood trembling with terror.

"Now let us go outside and make a run for the canoes."

They ascended the steps to the outside entrance, and stood in the shadow of the building.

The savages were now inside, yelling like fiends, and thundering about in the darkness in search of the whites.

For a moment our friends stood by the cabin, conversing in hurried whispers; but presently they broke and ran toward the landing, Sparrowhawk taking the lead and the young scout bringing up behind.

A savage left on guard at the landing gave the alarm. Sparrowhawk shot him dead.

Those in the cabin heard the pistol-shot, and at once came pouring from the house and yelling, toward the landing. Hellice and Elwe sprung into the first canoe they came to. Sparrowhawk gave the boat a shove, and sent it gliding across the open water into the reeds. Then he and Silver Star leaped into another boat and pulled out rapidly after the maidens, and in a moment they, too, were concealed from view of the red-skins in that wilderness of reeds.

The crash of rifles and the rattle of bullets, like hail, among the reeds followed.

"Thank God, we have escaped with our lives, if nothing else," said Sparrowhawk, dropping his paddle and inserting cartridges into his revolver.

"Yes, Sparrowhawk, but we are not out of danger yet," replied the Boy Knight.

"No; and so let us hurry forward and overtake the girls. We can then take them into our canoe and endeavor to elude the savages before we leave the swamp," said Sparrowhawk, taking up the paddle and driving the canoe into the narrow passage through the reeds.

They followed the path familiar to himself and his sister, supposing the girls would follow that course to the river. They moved along as fast as two paddles would carry them, and to their surprise and regret were not in sight or hearing of the maidens when half the distance to the river was made.

"It's singular we don't overtake them," said Silver Star; "we surely haven't passed them."

"No; Hellice would have kept this passage; moreover, they are in a light canoe and sister handles a paddle with wonderful skill. We'll be apt to find them at the river."

With this assurance they glided along. They were nearing the river, and as the girls were still not in sight, Sparrowhawk began to feel uneasy.

Finally they glided out into the river. The moonlight flooded the stream. Quickly the young men glanced up and down the glimmering, placid waters; but nowhere could the girls be seen.

"My God!" cried Sparrowhawk, "we have missed them, Silver Star!"

"And I fear the worst for them."

With the strength of a madman Sparrowhawk dipped the paddle and sent the canoe leaping through the water back into the reeds, then stopped and listened. But nothing on earth save the roar of the rising wind rushing over the wilderness of reeds could be heard.

"Oh, heavens! this is too bad. My poor sister! my poor little friend, Elwe!" groaned the young recluse.

"We may find them yet, Sparrowhawk; let us go back the way we came and search the side passages."

"We'll be sure to meet the accursed Blackfeet; but then, why should I care? I am growing desperate. This is worse than the torture-rack—death is preferable."

"Don't give up, Sparrowhawk," said Silver Star, in tones of encouragement; "I've stood face to face with death every five hours in the last forty-eight, and yet the hand of Providence has protected—saved me."

"Well, I'll admit I am too despondent at times," said the young recluse; "I will follow your suggestion, my friend."

He dipped his paddle, and again sent his canoe gliding along the passage they had come. It now became necessary to use more precaution, for they were liable to meet Blackfeet at any turn. Silver Star, who sat in the front of the boat, kept on the alert for danger, and when about half way back, the sound of voices fell upon his ears. He gave the alarm, and the canoe stopped. Both listened—both heard the voices. They were Indian voices.

The youths turned their boat aside, and pulled into the tall reeds, where they were well concealed from the main passage.

The dip of a paddle sounded near, and a moment later a canoe, with half-a-dozen Blackfeet, passed along, going in the direction of the river. It was immediately followed by several others, loaded with Indians and plunder from the cabin. It seemed to our friends that all must have left the swamp, and

as soon as the rear boat was out of hearing, they crept from their concealment, and moved on toward the cabin.

When a few rods from the landing, Sparrowhawk began searching the by-ways and passages that the otter and musk-rats had made through the reeds. A broken stalk, or a ripple on the water, might give him a clue as to where the maidens turned out of the main passage. He felt satisfied they were somewhere in the swamp. He would have shouted to them, but was afraid of directing the savages, not only to them, but to the girls also, should they—the girls—hear and answer him. The only safe course was to search in silence; and still this seemed a hopeless task.

Believing the savages had all left the vicinity of the cabin, the youths did not observe the precaution they would have otherwise done in their search. The frogs had resumed their unearthly music all over the swamp, which was the strongest evidence they had that the coast was clear.

They searched here and there for hours. Every passage connecting with the main channel was thoroughly explored, from one end to the other, but all with the same result. The girls could not be found.

At last the moon went down and put an end to the search.

The wind was still blowing from the south, and roared among the dry reeds as though a stately forest.

Running their canoe into a clump of willows, the young men concluded to await the coming of day.

"Well, my friend," said Sparrowhawk, as he laid down the paddle, "this is a sad and terrible night for me."

"Ay, Sparrowhawk, and for me, too," exclaimed Silver Star.

"But you have lost nothing, Silver Star, while I have lost my home, my darling sister, and my little friend, Elwe."

"You know not, Sparrowhawk, what I have lost."

"Yes, I mistrust it, my friend; but of this I do not want to talk. The thoughts of it almost made me a demon—a murderer."

"We cannot afford to be enemies, Sparrowhawk; we must find the girls, living or dead," said Silver Star, evasively.

"Of all the years I have resided here, my friend," the recluse went on, "Elwe was the first to enter our cabin, and her I carried here unconscious. You were the next, but not the last. The savages came, as you know, like the destroying hurricane. Had they not been Blackfeet, they would never have come. The Blackfeet live 'way north of here, and know nothing of the superstitious fear with which this swamp is regarded. No Sioux ever enters here. This I know, and when I left the society of civilization, and, with my little sister, became an exile, I selected this dismal place for my home. Here have I lived, hunting and trapping for a living, and going occasionally to the post for supplies and to barter my pelts. But I also went in disguise."

"I am surprised, Sparrowhawk, to hear you—a mere boy like myself—talkin' of bein' an exile. It must be you are such from choice—from your own free will."

"No, it is not; I am under a cloud, Silver Star," he answered, a slight tremor shaking his voice, "and you have caused me more fear and uneasiness than all the red-skins."

"You astonish me, Sparrowhawk—you have said this before; and yet I am as innocent of any intended wrong toward you, as a child unborn."

"I believe you, Silver Star. I know you have been my enemy, and yet you know it not."

"There is some mystery about you, Sparrowhawk, I see, plain enough," remarked the Boy Knight.

"Yes, I will admit it, Silver Star; and yet I dare not tell you what it is. Were it not for my poor, innocent sister and—and, well, one other fact, I would not care a farthing. But great heavens! were Hellice to know all, it would kill her—kill her dead, Silver Star!"

"Sparrowhawk!" suddenly exclaimed Silver Star, "it's growin' lighter; it can't be comin' day, can it?"

"No, surely not," replied Sparrowhawk, rising to his feet, and looking around him; "but my God! the cabin and the swamp is on fire! Silver Star, we have got to work for our lives!"

Silver Star rose to his feet, and looked southward over the swamp. The cabin of the recluse, surely enough, was wrapt in a sheet of flame, while along the south side of the swamp the reeds, dry as tinder, were on fire. And fanned by a strong south wind the flames were rolling and leaping toward heaven like fiery demons possessed. Blue, black smoke, filled with millions of sparks, went boiling and bursting upward into the inky sky.

It was an awful spectacle, and the light falling upon the faces of the two wretches, gave them the pallor of death.

"Oh, my Lord! where are they?—Hellice and Elwe?" burst from the Boy Knight's lips.

As if in answer to the question, a wild, terrified scream came over the swamp, mingled with the roar of the rolling, seething billows of fire.

The two, Silver Star and Sparrowhawk, exchanged glances. They could not speak. They listened; but they heard nothing more save the consuming fire.

Seating themselves they took up their paddles and began their flight.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SURVEYORS' CAMP.

"Yes, Kitsie," said Old Arkansaw, as he and Kit Bandy made their way back from the river into the woods, "that wife o' yours is a treasure—a genius. What woman ever born 'd a' thought of makin' "

canoe of her ambrilla, and sailin' out across a roarin' river?"

"Oh, yes; she's a jewel in *your* eye, Arkansaw, but if you'd 'a' had a red-hot skillet flapped over your head or a tater-masher driven into your diogeny as often as I have, you couldn't see anything smart in the old catapult that done the violence. Oh, I honestly wish the Ingins 'd skulp her, dash her old picters; but instead o' that she's act'ly bein' pompered up and courted by that old rip of a White Crane. He's even promised her the position of queen if she'd give up the white people entirely. Lordy! what a queen *she'd* make! Knock the socks offen Queen Victory of France. She's a doctor, and that's what makes the Ingins like her. She really does know somethin' 'bout pills and sich, and has brought more'n one buck Ingin out o' the kinks-a-flyin'." Oh! she's a sort of a goddess, and a free character 'mong them, and 's haydoogins of friends. But she can't stand it always. She'll flap her heel ag'in' the bucket some of these days, and then she'll call on Peter at the gates o' Paradise."

"Ah! you think she'll be an angel, do you?"

"She'll go through if she takes a notion in spite o' the doorkeeper's club. She's a will of her own, has Sabina, and alers makes a way; and I reckon she'll foller me upon earth and off."

"If she follers you, Kitsie, after you leave this zemisfear, she'll catch blue-blazes, now mind."

"She'll foller if she takes a notion, brimstone or no brimstone; but mebbey the devil and I both can head her off. But, looky here, Arky, suppose you and me visit that surveying party's camp and see what they're doin'. Somewhow 'r other I can't reconcile myself to Surveyor Braash and Scientific Daymon. Thar's plenty of royal old cussedness crappin' out o' their eyes; but, arter all, everybody ar'n't villains because they're not as handsome and lovely and sweet-spirited as you and me, Arky. Do you know that?"

"That's so, Kitsie; but thar's Silver Star that we must look arter, too; and, also, that dasted young feller with the sparryhawk cap and feather jacket. He's got that gal Elwe, 'bout which Silver Star talked so much; and, for some reason or other he's threatened the life of the Boy Knight. I've an idea sneak-in' under my skulp, Kit, that that Sparryhawk's not the clear quill."

"D'ye think so, Arkansaw? Why? State yer reason, will ye?"

"On account o' his mysterious comin' and goin'. Now none o' us knows a dasted thing 'bout where he belongs; and I've heard it loudly hinted that he's the leader of a gang o' robbers, and that his handle is Osman, the Outlaw."

"Great horn that pulled old Jericho! D'ye think thar's a shadder of truth in it, Arky?"

"Couldn't swear that thar is, but my own suspicion's what hinted it to me. A mule's heel's not always stationary when the mule's asleep, Kit Bandy; so keep that in your pipe."

Thus conversing the two old bordermen pushed on through the forest in the direction of the surveyors' camp, and in the course of a few hours they came in sight of the place. It was located in a natural defensive position, and commanded a view in all directions. It was situated upon a high hill or knoll sloping off in all directions. The sides of this knoll were barren of vegetation, smooth and covered with a sandy soil; but upon its crest grew a little clump of trees and in among these the surveyors had pitched their camp.

Without any hesitation Old Arkansaw and Kit Bandy ascended the hill and entered the camp where they were met by Surveyor Braash and his men.

The scouts took in the camp at a glance. There were about fifteen men of different nationalities, and some of forbidding looks, in the party. All were armed to the teeth and looked as though they would as soon fight as eat. A wagon of heavy military pattern, four draught mules and some twenty fine-looking saddle-horses and equipments comprised their outfit. As evidence of their business, there lay at one side a surveyor's staff, a compass, a theodolite, a Gunter's chain and pins, a flag-pole and other things pertaining to a first-class outfit of a surveying party.

"I am glad to meet you again, gentlemen," said Herman Braash, "and hope you will accept of the hospitality of our camp as long as you feel so disposed."

"Thank you, strangers," replied Bandy; "we're great guns for fun and good eatin'. We may, and we may not stay here awhile with you—jist owin' to the weather."

"I desire, gentlemen," said Professor Daymon, "to secure the assistance of one of you a few minutes in helping me make up the topography of this country. Whichever is the best acquainted with this vicinity will please step into my tent."

Kit Bandy motioned to Arkansaw to go with him, so the old scout followed him into the tent. The first thing the professor did was to take from an innocent-looking camp-chest a bottle of liquor and a small goblet and invite Arkansaw to drink. The old man touched the liquor lightly, and Daymon, after drinking himself, took a small, portable secretary from his chest and opening it drew a well-executed map of the White Earth river country therefrom. This he spread out before Arkansaw, and then said: "I presume you can read and write, can you, Arkansaw?"

"Sorry to say, perfesser, that I don't know 'B' from bull's foot. I used to have a hang of the letters, but as it alers seemed a waste of the raw material to be thinkin' 'em over, I let 'em slip and filled up my noggin with some good, useful reseats for burns, curin' peltries and sich."

"Well, I don't know as the want of a knowledge of the alphabet will hinder you giving me just as

much information as though you had the learning of Humboldt. This map, now, embraces this country so far as the geographical dimensions are concerned; but many of the prominent features of the region are not indicated by location, and as we have to make a complete report, even to minute details, we must have the information to make it upon. To travel the country over would require much time and labor, and so we decided to call some one already acquainted with the lay of the land, as the saying goes."

"Yes, yes," said Arkansaw, gazing upon the map; "but what river's that, perfesser?" he said, pointing to a red line running north and south across the map.

"That's not a river, but an isothermal line, Arkansaw," explained the professor, smiling at the old man's childlike ignorance; "but now, let us commence at the Sioux village and follow east down the river: what are the general features of the country?"

"Wal, professor, I'm not very handy in making g'ography, but then I'll tackle it best I know how. Arter leavin' the Si-ox village the country, for a ways is level and lightly timbered, but after it gits into the vicinity of the Spirit Swamp it's tumbled up wuss than a trundle-bed, and kivered with stunted pines and grubs, till ye can't rest. Then comes the Spirit Swamp—a nasty dismal hole; put her down, perfesser. Thar's more'n five hundred acres of it, and nothin' but reeds and willers, and frogs grow and ripen there."

"Is it accessible by foot or by canoe?" asked the professor.

"They say it's navi-gate-able for canoes, tho' I can't say sure enough for g'ography. You see the swamp bucks up against the north side of the river; put it down, perfesser; and a canoe could enter it from the White Earth. But as it's said to be the abode of spirits and goblins, put it down, perfesser, that Old Arkansaw Abe, who's not afeard to face death and distruction, could not be hired to enter it in broad daylight."

"Then you have never explored the swamp?" asked Daymon.

"Explored it? Heavens. I'd as soon think of explorin' purgatory. Why, perfesser, when I pass along the river whar the Spirit buckles on to her, I feel cold and chokish. It seems as though the wind is always blowin' over the swamp, and sich a roar as them reeds make—why, I sw'ar it would make the h'ar raise on a dead nigger's head. Oh, a dasted bad pill is the Spirit Swamp; put her down, perfesser."

For fully an hour Arkansaw continued his description of the country, and when Daymon had obtained all the information of this character desired, he turned the conversation upon other topics. The weather, the hunting, the Indians—all were fully discussed; and finally Daymon remarked, incidentally:

"We were all wonderfully worked up the other night, when encamped south of here, by the appearance of a dark spot against the clear sky. Many were the conjectures as to what it was, but none was right, for it proved to be a balloon. It was going north, and appeared to be settling toward the earth; but what became of it I know not."

"That was the night of the twenty-fust, wer'n't it?" asked Old Arkansaw.

"Let me see," said the professor, reflectively. "I believe it was—yes, it was the night of the twenty-first; I remember now. Did you see it?"

"No, but Silver Star, the Boy Knight of the Peraro, did; and that's not all. The balloon was nighly down when he see'd it, and he heard the ballooners quarrelin' like man and wife 'mong themselves 'bout somethin', and presently he saw a bundle let down from the balloon with a rope. Then up went the air-boat, and the fellers begun to quarrel ag'in, and presently the boy saw somethin'—well, it was a man—thrown out o' the balloon and come screamin' down through the air, and strikin' the ground, was mashed into a lump of red liver. And that bundle, perfesser, turned out to be the sweetest little gal—so Silver Star said—you ever see'd."

"Good heavens! do you believe it, Arkansaw?"

"Yes; Silver wouldn't lie."

"What became of the girl?"

"Well, Silver took charge of her—put her on his hoss and started to the fort; but the Ingins got after 'em and he sent her on to the fort, and he dodged off afoot. But alas! the hoss come through all hunky, but thar was no gal on his back."

"You don't tell!" exclaimed the professor; "then Silver Star doesn't know anything about her?"

"No, I know he don't."

"Do you have any idea where she is, Arkansaw?"

"If you can find the den of one Sparryhawk, a young trapper, or hunter or somethin', I think you'll find the gal there. I heard him tell a person so, and—"

At this juncture Arkansaw caught the eye of Kit Bandy who was standing near, and who gave the scout a look that expressed more than words could have done. However, to get around an abrupt break in his honest revelation of facts, he went right on.

"But that Sparryhawk is a crazy loon that imagines himself lord of creation and cock of the fodder-walk. My 'pinion is, that the gal dumped out of the balloon's deader'n Mother Eve, perfesser."

"Very likely," replied Daymon, making an entry in his diary.

The two conversed a few minutes longer, then rose and went out, when a general, running conversation ensued. Presently Daymon and Braash left camp in opposite directions, but managed to get together on the south side of the grove. But of these movements Bandy and Arkansaw appeared to take no notice.

Kit walked about camp examining, with a childish curiosity, the surveying instruments and outfit; and finally he strolled off toward the north side of the *motte*, and took a look at the country beyond. Over among the wooded hills he saw a smoke rising as from a camp, and it filled his mind with no little wonder and curiosity.

While pondering the matter over he heard a slight, fluttering sound at his right, and looking around he discovered a red flag attached to a bush flapping in the wind. And he had no sooner discovered this than he saw a horseman emerge from the woods in a line with the smoke over among the hills, and ride toward him. It did not require a second glance to tell him that it was an Indian, and as he came nearer, Kit saw, to his surprise, that it was a Blackfoot chief.

"Wal, now, what's brought the Blackfeet away down hereaways?" the old man mused. "Horn of Joshua! if the Si-oxes git wind of it, they'll bounce 'em like ducks would a June-bug. And the bugger is comin' right smack up this way. Who knows—"

The sound of footsteps cut short his soliloquy, and turning he saw Professor Daymon approaching.

"Perfesser," he said, pointing toward the Indian, "what does that mean? Can you explain it?"

"By gracious! it's an Indian, isn't it?" exclaimed Daymon.

"Yes, a Blackfoot chief," responded Bandy, eying Daymon.

"Well, he mustn't enter our camp," said Daymon, "and count our force, or he might give us trouble. I will go out and meet him, and find out what he's after."

Daymon advanced from the thicket and moved down the knoll until he met the Indian. The latter dismounted and the two held a long conversation, keeping the horse between them and Kit. Finally the chief mounted and rode back toward the woods; and as the professor approached Bandy, he said:

"I coaxed the vagrant and cutthroat to go back for fear the boys would raise his hair."

"What's the Blackfeet doin' down here, two or three hundred miles out of their own latitude?"

"He says a few of them came down to hunt buffalo, but I don't believe him. I think they're looking up Sioux scalps."

"Neither do I," responded Kit, in a tone that caused the professor to look up as if in doubt as to what he meant.

The two returned to camp, talking as they went.

Dinner was soon announced by a strapping big negro cook.

Upon invitation, Kit and Arkansaw broke bread with the surveyors.

After the repast was over the old scouts concluded to take their departure, and as they were not urged to stay, they had no difficulty in getting away.

When out in the woods, Old Arkansaw asked:

"Well, Kitsie, my posey, what do you think of the surveyers?"

"Not quite as much as you do, for I didn't tell 'em everything I knowed, and guess at what I didn't know, as I heard you doin'. Oh, by the time you've served a term or two of married life you'll be a leetle more keeful how you shoot off that lip of yours."

"Don't you think they're surveyers, Kit? Haven't they got their compass, and chains, and flag-poles, and kind words, and good treatment, and all sich? humph? say, Kitsie?"

"Yes, and didn't Judas have a kiss for our Savior when he betrayed Him? humph? say, Arkansaw?"

"Oh, well, if yer goin' to quotin' Skriptor and usin' of metaphysics, I ar'n't thar, Ka-ristopher. My book-larnin's not very plentiful, and so if ye want to run with me, you've got to talk solid sense right at me. But I can fetch one, Kitsie, that can hold you level on the talk till the cows come home—that can read and talk on any subject from matromony to a Bab'lonian inscription."

"Your confidant, Professor Daymon, eh?"

"No, that old honey-mug of yours, Sabina Bandy."

"Oh, Arkansaw! you're a fiend—you delight in torturin' me—you're second cousin to old Satan."

"Thanks for the rose-tinted compliment, Kitsie; but all jokin' aside, I struck a lead in Skinfintic Daymon's tent by stretchin' the blanket a leetle and bein' communicative."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; he took out a map of these diggin's and axed me if I could read. I told him no, but I *meant* that I couldn't read Hottentot, and then he showed me the map. The fust thing that rested my 'tention was a red line runnin' north and south across the map, and I axed, innercently, what river it war, and says he, smilin': 'It's not a river, but an *icythermule line*, or some sich a name. But right thar, Bandy, is whar the little eddycation, that I had mauled into me at the Brimstone Holler school-house, come into play. Right along that red line it said: 'track of the balloon.'"

"Horn of Joshua!"

"Yes, sir; that's what she said, Bandy, and it's my solemn opinion that Skinfintic Daymon's the man that run that balloon that Silver Star got the gal out of. He talked about the balloon—said they all see'd her pass over 'em; but somehow 'r other I couldn't swaller all he said after he lied 'bout that icythermule line. Now how's that, Adonis of beauty?"

"Wal, that's been my opinion, all along, of them. They may be government surveyors, and all that, but that doesn't hinder 'em from bein' rascals. Government has lots of sich servants," said Kit.

"Wal, I mean to look around that Blackfoot camp, and keep an eye open," declared Arkansaw.

"Second the motion, Arkansaw, for I think thar's

a chance for haydoogins or fun atwixt this and to-morrow night. 'Thar's a nigger in the wood-pile, somewhere."

"The fust I do 'll be to reconnoiter that Blackfoot camp when night comes, and see what relation it bears to the surveyers' camp; and if thar isn't some skulps to be h'isted. And it might be sich a thing that Silver Star's in their clutches."

"Well, while you're doin' the Blackhoof camp, I'll run up and interview the Si-ox hornit-nest."

"Hate to lose your comp'ny, Ka-ristofer."

"I'll meet you round these diggin's in a day or two—mebby sooner. You may expect me down on you at any moment."

The two old bordermen parted, Bandy going west, and Arkansaw, by a circuitous route, going in the direction of the Blackfoot camp. The latter did not hurry, for it was some time until night, and darkness was necessary for a successful reconnoissance.

When night at length came, he pushed forward and soon came in sight of the camp. A dim camp-fire marked its location, and with the stealth of a shadow he crept toward it until he had gained a point where he could command a good view of the place. He counted not less than thirty Blackfoot warriors and two white men. One of the latter he would have sworn was Professor Daymon, of the corps of surveyors, although he might have been mistaken.

He saw that the Indians were making preparations for breaking camp, and that the white men were directing their movements and assisting in packing up. The savages were all painted and plumed for the war-path, and when they at length took their departure, Old Arkansaw could not imagine what point they were aiming for. To satisfy himself, however, he resolved to follow them, and by the time the last savage was out of camp, he was upon their trail—following within hearing distance behind.

For some time they journeyed on through the woods, but finally reached the shores of the White Earth river, where a halt was made. A wide, sandy beach separated the river from woods, and this enabled Arkansaw to see all their movements. He was surprised to see a number of canoes, large and small, lying upon the beach, and he was still more surprised when he saw the savages launch the boats and embark therein.

"Whar can the demons be goin'?" he asked himself.

Across the river lay the Spirit Swamp, and as if in answer to his question, the convoy of savages paddled over the stream and disappeared in the dark labyrinths of the black, dismal swamp.

"The bloody bastions!" exclaimed the old scout to himself, "they're goin' to explore that swamp. 'Thar's deviltry on foot, or else they're doin' it in the interest of science and g'ography. By the eye of Jupiter! I wonder, if in givin' that Skinflintic Daymon the lay of the land, and in describin' Spirit Swamp, I have made an infernalated jassack of myself, as Old Kit intimated? Great Goshen! I'll swan if I had a canoe I'd foller 'em, if I got completely abolished afore I got out o' thar."

Thus musing, the borderman kept his watch by the shore—waiting for the red-skins to return. Two hours or more had passed, when suddenly the report of firearms, mingled with savage yells, came rolling over the swamp.

"My good Lord of Israel!" said the scout, "the demons have found the retreat of some one—are murderin' and skalpin' innocent people, and I, old blockhead and jassack, am to blame for it all! I thought I was so smart tellin' all I knowed and hintin' at what I didn't know! Great Judea! just listen! It's a regular battle."

For some time the sound of conflict rung over the water, then all became silent. But Arkansaw still kept his watch by the river, and presently saw a canoe glide out of the swamp into the stream. It contained two occupants, whom the old scout recognized as Sparrowhawk and Silver Star, the Boy Knight. He was about to call to them, when, to his surprise he saw a dark, round object emerge from the woods, and pause just within the moonlight.

"By Judas!" he exclaimed, "that's that infernal Silent Slayer, and I'd give all my right and title in the sulphur regions if I could git one squint behind the critter's black shield. I'll be switched if it isn't queer."

As he concluded his remarks, he turned his eyes toward the swamp, just in time to see Silver Star and Sparrowhawk glide back into the wilderness of reeds.

"I reckon," he thought, "them young cockalores have made up, or they wouldn't be prancin' 'round in their gondola so gay; and I'll bet a coon-skin that Sparrowhawk lives in that swamp, and that he's been Blackfooted out. But whar's that gal I heard him tellin' Nathelah about? Ah! that Nathelah! I'll bet she's a fraud—taken Sparrybird in hand-somely."

Another hour went by, and the next thing that attracted the old borderer's eye was a beam of light that shot suddenly into the sky from near the center of the swamp, while almost at the same instant a dozen other red lights flashed up along the south side.

Full well he knew what it meant—the savages had fired the swamp.

He watched the light. It grew brighter and brighter. Higher and higher the flames rose. Deep and dense the smoke rolled upward, with forked tongues of fire bursting out of it.

"Oh, salvation! somebody's goin' to be eternally roasted!" groaned Arkansaw; "and nobody's to blame but me—ah! there, by the wives of Solomon!"

This exclamation was caused by sight of a number of canoes that came gliding from the swamp into the

river. In the foremost one he saw two women, evidently captives. Of this there could be no doubt, for the light of the burning swamp lit up the surface of the White Earth with the glare of the noonday sun, revealing the very features of the savages in the boats.

The red-skins paddled across the river, and landed a few rods above where Arkansaw stood. Here they held a short consultation, when about half of them, with the two captives, re-embarked in the canoes, and turning down the river paddled out of sight. As they passed before him, Arkansaw saw that the captives were young girls, and he felt certain that one of them was Elwe, of whom Silver Star had told him.

The savages that landed took their way back toward their camp in the woods, and Arkansaw again found himself alone, waiting and watching for the Boy Knight and his companion.

The fire, by this time, had spread down toward the river, and flung its red beams across the water against the black wall of the forest trees. It shone full upon the old man's face with a white, gairish light.

"Great Gehoviah!" he finally exclaimed; "I do wonder if Silver Star and Sparryhawk 'll git roasted in that lake of fire? Mighty Moses! that is a grand, awful and—"

He felt something touch his belt, and looking around, he saw a great bony hand lift his knife and revolver from his belt from behind. A cry burst from his lips, and turning quickly, he found himself face to face with the Sioux chief, White Crane.

Silent as a shadow had the renegade approached and taken the weapons from Arkansaw's girdle, while he stood awe-stricken by the fiery spectacle before him. But the instant their eyes met, the old scout's fist was aimed, with lightning quickness, at the face of the chief; but the latter was on his guard, and warding the blow, he clenched with his white foe.

And together the two men went down in a hand-to-hand struggle—locked in each other's embrace like maddened tigers.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.

CLASPED in each other's deadly embrace, Old Arkansaw and the renegade chief, White Crane, rolled from the shadows of the woods onto the beach that was now lit up with the glow of the burning swamp. No tree was between them this time. It was a fair, open-field fight with no weapon save those that Nature had given them.

No blows were struck for they were hugged up so close that it was impossible to strike, even had their arms not been locked about each other's forms. First they were in one spot, then another—now up and then down, whirling and spinning around in rapid evolutions, their feet kicking up clouds of sand and dirt. They fought in comparative silence, for each seemed afraid the other had friends near. Nothing save their heavy breathing and an occasional groan as they fell could be heard. They seemed so nearly matched in strength that for several minutes it would have been impossible to have told who would be the victor. It was evident, the way they fought, that endurance was to settle the conflict. Both men were wiry and supple for men of their age and ungainly proportions.

For fully two or three minutes the struggle continued, but, finally, Arkansaw succeeded in breaking the Indian's locked arms, and in seizing him by the throat. This closed the red-skin's breathing apparatus in a twinkling, and by a sudden movement the scout gained a position astride of his foe's body, and set about choking him to death in a systematic way.

"Nu-iff! 'nu-iff!" came whistling from the Indian's lungs in a startling manner.

Arkansaw loosened up on his throttle and allowed him to get his breath.

"'Nough, old ejiot, 'nough," again blurted the chief, and in a tone that startled Arkansaw, who exclaimed:

"Good Lord! did I hear aright?"

"Yes, I'll cave, Arky, was the Indian's reply.

"Kit Bandy, by the holy juggernaut!" and the old scout leaped from the prostrate body of his old friend.

"Yes, Arkansaw, I am Old Kit Bandy," said the chief, White Crane, rising to his feet and shaking the dirt from his body, and feeling of his throat as if to assure himself it was all there.

"Well, what in the tarnation do you mean by pitchin' into me in that way, Bandy? Are you crazy?"

"No. I wanted your skulp, you white vagabone. I didn't recognize you at fust; and, Lord-ee! I shudder when I think how nigh I come to killin' you, Arkansaw."

"Yes, now you did, didn't ye, ye sweet old honey-mug? Another minute and I'd 'a' had the stuffin' choked out of ye. I reckon you see now you're no match for Old Arkansaw, don't you? You're a handsomer man, I'll admit, but you can't hold wind enough to tussle with me, can you?"

"Oh, pshaw, Arky! I war jist playin' with you as a cat plays with a mouse, and I'm awful glad I found out it war you, or your scalp 'd 'a' ornamented the lodge of the Ingin gal that sings in my heart, and that's to make glad my soul and cook my corn-dodgers. Great horn—I mean waugh!—I'm the great war-chief of the Si-ox nation, and I can hardly keep my hands off your flossy hair, Arky. Oh, I feel devilish, bloodthirsty—I feel like a hurricane with nothin' to tear up root and branch. Waugh!"

"You look somethin' like a sick polecat, Kitsie, dancin' 'long a marsh. But what hurts me is to find that you, Old Kit Columbus Bandy, are that infer-

nal, ugly chief, White Crane. That, I say, is what's killin' me now."

"It's a fact, Arkansaw, nigh as I come bein' your last attack of cholera morbus."

"But how is it you're playin' red-skin and white—friend and foe, to whites and Ingins alike? Why, Kit, you're two-faceder than the very old devil hisself! Do you know this won't win?"

"It has won, Arkansaw, and if you'll jist keep that clap-trap in your head still, it'll win ag'in; and some day I'll let you into a leetle secret of my own that'll start the hair on your bald pate in a holy, second. Now, Kit Bandy's not sleepin' round like some folks I know; and if that blamed wife o' mine should find out that White Crane's her own husband, she'd go through me sizzin' hot, don't ye see? No, Arkansaw Abraham, you jist keep a stiff upper lip 'bout this, and if ever occasion should require that I scalp you before some of my braves, grin and bear it like Gotamozin when the Spaniards broiled him for breakfast one mornin'. You'll git your reward, if you do, in the great Hereafter, and that'll be somethin' in your favor. Why, I've been a kind of a one-hoss war-chief these two years, and I'll tell you how I come to be one, and what I've done, some of these days, if I don't scalp ye before then. I've given you this light on the subject so's you needn't make a fool of yourself hereafter. You see a little paint, a feather or two, and a change of my duds inside out, along with a blanket, makes a different lookin' bird outen Ka-ristofer Ka-lumbus Bandy."

"Witches and warlocks, yes! it makes you the ugliest, orneryest, punkin'est-lookin' old curmudgeon that war ever permitted to disgrace the human family. If you'd let your wife know that White Crane is her husband she'd lay herself out and die without a groan. Good heavens, Kit! go wash yer face, and fix up your clothes and take them feathers out of yer hair, or I'll be cussed if I don't bounce ye again."

Taking the old scout's advice, Kit went down to the river, washed the paint off his hands and face, combed his hair out with his fingers and changed his clothing inside out. When he had thus made his toilet he looked like another being when he went back to where Arkansaw awaited him.

Gathering up their side-arms and rifles, the two compared notes since parting, and, after a short consultation, concluded to follow the Blackfeet who had gone down the river with the girl captives. Both Kit and Arkansaw felt positive as to who the girls were in the power of the Blackfeet, and as they had not been gone over half an hour they had high hopes of overtaking them soon.

The pursuers moved along briskly and silently for men as loquacious as they were, and, contrary to their most sanguine hope, they came in sight of a canoe sooner than they had any reason to expect.

"That's the rear guard," said Old Kit, "and the other 'ns are not fur ahead."

"Not fur," replied Arkansaw; "but when we overtake them there'll be so many of them we can't manage them, I'm afraid."

"We can wait and watch our chances, Arky."

They moved on and finally came in sight of all the canoes. They were strung along a rod or more apart, and in the second one from the lead were the captive girls bowed down with grief and sorrow.

As Arkansaw had predicted, they had overtaken the enemy and found themselves at a loss to know how to act.

The river was not over seventy yards wide, and as the canoes were in the middle of it the Blackfeet were within easy pistol-shot; but should they fire upon the savages and even kill three or four, it would put the survivors on their guard and in all probability cut off all chances of rescuing the maidens.

"Horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Old Kit, "if you'll fetch 'em over here two at a time, Arky, I'll salivate the hull b'llin' in a twinkling."

"Yes, Kitsie, you are a regular sallyvator, you are, for a fact; but suppose—Hullo!"

Something fell in the water near the hindmost canoe with a loud splash, causing the Indians, as well as our friends, to start. All saw the waves circling out from where the object fell, and while all eyes were watching these, one of the savages uttered a groan and began floundering about the canoe in terrible distress. The greatest excitement prevailed among the savages and the canoes began to "bunch" up around that with the wounded warrior, when a perfect shower of rocks began to rain upon and around the red-skins.

"By the horn that knocked old Jericho!" exclaimed Kit, "do you see that, Arky? 'Thar's somebody on t'other side of the river bombardin' them near canoes with stones. Hear 'em rattle and thump ag'in' the canoes! Jewhiz! ain't there a lively scratchin' among the red rovers of Satan? That's fun, Arky; the red devil-catchers don't know which side them dornicks are flung from. Who do you suppose 's doin' that?"

"Friends, of course," averred old Arkansaw; "but what do you say, ole beauty, let's open our battery on 'em, too. I believe we can run 'em aground, or make 'em surrender. I can shy a stone, Bandy, as true as any boy that ever punched a glass outen a meetin'-house winder."

"All right, Arky; we can have some fun if nothing more," replied Bandy, and groping about the two gathered up some rocks and began "shelling" the exposed canoes with no little effect.

This was a new mode of warfare to the red-skins, and for awhile they seemed perfectly bewildered and panic-stricken. They knew not from which shore the missiles came, but rallying, after a moment's thought, they opened a random fire on both shores.

Every warrior in the rear canoe was killed or

placed *hors-du-combat* by the silent assailants, while several in the other canoes had received severe and painful wounds.

Once the red-skins made an attempt to land upon the north shore, but a shower of stones drove them back, and feeling sure that they had discovered the side from which the danger came, headed for the south shore. Now was Kit and Arkansaw's turn, and the way they rained stones upon the advancing Blackfeet was equal to a masked battery, and the warriors were forced back into the middle of the stream in confusion.

Up to this time the canoe with the captives had been held off to one side out of danger, and as it had not been attacked, the Indians conceived the idea of using it as a defense, and placed it, with the wounded warriors, in the center of the little fleet. As this placed the maidens in as much danger as their captors, the assault ceased and the boats pulled out rapidly down the stream. But Kit and Arkansaw followed.

"Gol blast them!" exclaimed Arkansaw, punching Kit in the ribs, "didn't we give them goss, Kitisie? Splendid shots—splendid fun! I could live on it."

"Yes, but they've got the wind on us now, by running them gals in among 'em. But, horn of Joshua! wouldn't I give my interest on the moon to know who them fellers are over on t'other side?"

"I can tell you one thing: they're enemies to them Blackfeet," answered Arkansaw; "but look thar, see that—blessed if them pizen tarantulas arn't goin' to halt on that island and wait for reinforcements."

"Yes, confound 'em; now that'll be against us; but then we can hang round here jist as long as they can stay over thar. Them gals we want, and them gals we'll have, or die deader 'an old Noah."

"Second the motion," added Arkansaw.

The island upon which the Blackfeet took shelter from their unknown enemy was covered with driftwood and a sparse growth of tall willows, affording a very good temporary shelter. The river was also wider at this point, and all in all, the savages were well protected—particularly from a repetition of the assault with stones.

All at once quiet reigned on the island, save now and then a groan from the lips of one of the wounded warriors.

Kit and Arkansaw sat down and poked their fun at each other, quarreled a little in their way, and upon the whole expressed their mutual regret in the sudden ending of what promised to be a lively adventure.

An hour had passed in this manner. The moon was sinking low in the west. Shadows were deepening in the woods and stealing along the shore. The croak of a bull-frog and the chirrup of a cricket were the only sounds that now disturbed the night. But suddenly, a sharp scream pierced the air. It was a woman's voice!

The old bordermen started to their feet. Their hearts leaped into their throats. They listened, and to their ears came that same shrill, sharp voice that seemed to say:

"A-lee-okal! a-lee-okal!"

Looking up the river above the island, Kit and Old Arkansaw discovered that which startled them. Upon the water, standing erect, her feet surrounded by a dark nimbus, was a woman floating at the will of the current, down toward the island.

"Horn of Joshua!" cried Kit, laying his hand on his friend's arm; "'tis she, Arkansaw, Sabina Bandy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"And it's over the river and over the sea."

HELICE and Elwe, after leaving their male friends, were so excited as to become totally bewildered in the Spirit Swamp; and in this sad predicament had they wandered into the power of the very ones they were endeavoring to elude. It was their scream that rung over the swamp at the time Sparrowhawk and Silver Star discovered the swamp on fire. It was at this moment that they were captured by the Blackfeet and hurried from the burning swamp to the river, and thence down that stream to the island whither they had been followed by the silent footsteps of anxious friends.

Sad and sorrowful, indeed, were the girls. Elwe had never seen an Indian before, and the sight of them filled her poor heart with fear. Hellice remained sad, silent and sorrowful in her wondrous beauty. Not only did she mourn her own fate, but that of her brother; and, too, her thoughts dwelt much upon that gallant, noble youth, Silver Star, with a strange unrest in her young heart. Had they escaped? Accepting the bright side of the question, she convinced herself they had; and then, across her mental vision, blotting out all hope, would sweep those awful flames of the burning swamp, exciting her imagination until she could almost hear the suffering cries of her brother and Silver Star coming from out the fire.

The Indians were twelve in number, though one of them had been killed by their unknown assailants, and over half of the others wounded—one or two dangerously. Of the latter, one was suffering untold agonies from a broken head. Every breath he drew was marked by a groan, and the ministrations of his friends failed to give relief.

Being in the Sioux country, the Blackfeet acted altogether on the defensive. They were not strong enough to attempt any demonstrations of revenge, now that they were aware of enemies being upon their trail, however great was their desire to avenge the death of their comrade. Among their number was a white man who appeared, at times, to direct the movements of the party through a young chief

whom he called Bounding Elk, and who spoke English tolerably well. The face of the white man, Hellice saw, was covered with a mask of false whiskers. He also wore, as a mask to his person, no doubt, a long blue military overcoat and a slouched hat. His voice was entirely strange to her, but to Elwe it was vaguely familiar. It was like a voice one hears in a dream. Somewhere the little lady had heard the voice, but she could not recall the place nor the person.

Having landed and sought the shelter of the island, a rude tent was hastily constructed for the captives out of sticks and blankets; and anxious to be out of sight of their hateful captors, it was a great relief to the girls when the thin walls of the lodge shut them from view.

The captives, locked in each other's arms, now gave way to tears. In silence they wept and sobbed until that resignation of heart came which can only be reached through the flow of scalding tears.

"It seems as though I were born for sorrow and suffering, Elwe," Hellice finally said, as she dried her tears and endeavored to calm her emotions.

"Oh, my poor, dear friend," replied Elwe, with a tremulous, broken voice, "one so young and full of promise and love should not suffer so. I know you have not sinned, Hellice; you are too pure, too noble, to sin. Neither has your noble brother."

"If all thought so, Elwe, brother and I would never have been hiding away in the lonely solitude of the Spirit Swamp," responded Hellice, her voice growing stronger; "and yet, I would not have you understand this to be an admission of wrong—of guilt. That which sent us fugitives here never troubled me, for I felt certain time would change all; but it is that which has come to my ears since that troubles me, Elwe."

"Oh, my poor friend, I do wish I could comfort you!" replied Elwe; "I thought you were so happy in your secluded home."

"All is not gold that glitters, Elwe. Often I have gone, dressed in male attire, with brother, who was also in disguise as my father, to the different trading-posts around for supplies, and while there have I heard the name of Osman, the Outlaw and Robber, spoken by everybody with apparent fear and revengeful hatred."

"Then you are afraid of that bad, wicked man, Hellice?" asked Elwe.

"No, I am not so afraid of him as I am troubled of other things—suspicions that a chain of circumstances has given rise to in my mind. But I cannot tell you now, Elwe—perhaps never—what they are. I will say this much, however: they are connected with the very same facts that have made Sparrowhawk the avowed enemy of Silver Star. My suspicions may be all wrong; in fact, I pray Heaven they are, and that all may be proven out clear, even though brother be dead."

At this instant the sound of voices outside arrested the girls' attention. They listened in breathlessly silence. They heard the disguised white man saying:

"It will be death, Bounding Elk, to attempt to leave here without reinforcements. The friends of the girls are after us. It is not Sioux, for Sioux would not have attacked us with stones."

"Yes, Sky Traveler, our enemies are on the watch," replied Bounding Elk; "we must send runner back to Blackfoot camp for other warriors to come drive pale-faces away."

"That's easier said than done," replied the white man, "for we're cooped up here now with nothing to eat; and if the Sioux should get after us we'd lose our scalps."

"Sky Traveler is wise," responded the Indian; "when the moon go down—darkness comes—mebby runner git away then, and go for friends."

"That's what I've been thinking of doing, Bounding Elk. The moon 'll soon go down, then one of us must get ashore some way or other. But our lynx-eyed enemies are shrewd. They will watch our movements close."

"Waugh!" suddenly exclaimed the chief, for at this juncture a sudden commotion among the red-skins arrested their attention, and hurrying to the upper side of the island they soon discovered the cause.

Standing erect upon the water and floating down toward the island at the will of the current, they saw a white woman. Her feet were concealed in some dark object—not a canoe, nor in anything the astonished red-skins could make out.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sky Traveler, as she drifted nearer, "I recognize that creature. She's a crazy white woman—a wild roving thing with a shattered mind. She'll land here, perhaps, and if she does, maybe we can use her to advantage."

Bounding Elk turned to his warriors and interpreted the white man's words, at the same time giving orders not to harm the woman whose mind the Great Spirit had clouded.

The woman continued down toward the island and finally reached the upper side. With the agility of a cat she bounded ashore from her queer-looking boat, then turning, pulled the craft from the water by means of an upright post planted in the center. To the astonishment of the gaping crowd, they saw that the boat was nothing but an umbrella which the woman closed with a snap, and then turning to the crowd gathered around her gazing upon her with savage curiosity, exclaimed:

"Well, I reckon as what you'll all know me the next time you see me, won't you?"

"It strikes me I know you now," said Sky Traveler.

"Well, it don't make a whit's bit of difference whether you know me or not," the woman replied, indignantly; "my name is Ellen Sabina Bandy. I am the lawfully wedded consort of old Kit Columbus

Bandy who deserted my bed and board through pure, undefiled cussedness; but, please gracious, noble red-men, the day 'll soon dawn that will witness my revenge—sweet, glorious revenge."

"Mrs. Bandy," said the disguised Sky Traveler, "I am astonished to hear that Kit Bandy's a married man."

"Yes, these twenty years, the old Bedouin; but, please gracious, he's not had much rest since he left me without provocation."

"Is he in the vicinity now, Mrs. Bandy?"

"I don't know; I met him t'other morning up the river, but before I could git him haltered, the owddacious old scamp jumped and run like a Turk. But, please gracious, he'll never come that on me again. I've a little shootin'-iron here that'll fetch him in from taw if he ever attempts sich a game again," and she thrust her hand in her bosom and displayed the butt of a pistol.

The Indians were wonderfully pleased with this odd specimen of female humanity, and believing, with that sacredness with which the Indian regards such persons, that she was crazy, she was allowed the perfect freedom of the camp and island.

A groan from the lips of the suffering Indian suddenly arrested the old woman's attention, and pricking up her ears, she exclaimed:

"What's that a-groanin'?"

"A wounded Indian," said the white man.

"Good!" exclaimed Sabina, "for here goes. I'm a doctor as well as a wronged and injured wife. I practice a little as I go along to pay expenses," and swinging her dripping umbrella to her shoulder she strode away across the island to where the wounded Indian lay writhing in his agony.

"Well, where are you ailing, red-skin?" she inquired, bending over the warrior.

"He's got a broken head," explained Sky Traveler; "and I don't think thar's any hope for him, Mrs. Bandy."

"Well, if he's got to die," she said, "die it is; but I'll give him an easy send-off. I allers like to see one shuffle off this mortal kile gracefully. Nothin's so becomin' to a man as to die gracefully."

The woman took from her sachel a small vial of white powder and emptied some of the contents into a small blue glass tumbler. This she diluted with water from the river, and then poured the whole down the red-skin's throat. This done she sprinkled some of the powder on the wound.

"There now," she remarked, with an air of one who had done a gracious deed, "you'll feel easier, I reckon; you'll not be bellerin' much more to-night, if ye ever open your chops ag'in this side of the day of judgment."

"I hope you haven't killed him, old woman," said the white man; for almost instantly the arms of the suffering warrior dropped limp at his side, and he went off into a quiet, peaceful slumber.

"Kill him?" shouted the doctress; "I don't kill, please gracious; I cure! But oh, how I would like to dope old Kit Bandy till he'd sleep and dream like a lotus-eater where golden gardens glow! If thar's any others that would like treatment let him say so."

The Blackfeet were astonished by the magic influence the woman had exerted over the wounded warrior, and another Indian who had received a severe cut from a stone, advanced and asked the old woman to administer to his injuries, which she did; and in a few minutes the Indian, under the influence of the opiate, was entirely out of his misery. This second successful treatment gave Sabina a very exalted place in the minds of the Indians, notwithstanding the sneers and contempt with which the white man regarded her and her performances.

Catching sight of the captain's tent, the old doctress, with her womanly curiosity, advanced, and in attempting to draw aside the blanket that covered it, tore the whole top off the structure, letting the moonlight in upon the girls, who, with white sad faces, glanced up at the old woman with a little cry of surprise.

"Great constellations!" exclaimed Sabina, placing her arms akimbo, and staring first upon the girls and then at the Indians, "if here isn't a pair of pet angels may I never set eyes on old Kit Columbus Bandy again!"

Sky Traveler, as the Indians, for some reason or other had named the white man, laughed sarcastically at the surprise expressed by the woman.

"And I see they're captives—been weepin'," continued Sabina. "Oh, red-skins! shame on you! The wrath of an angry God will be visited upon you! Oh, girls, you pretty little darlings! who are you, anyhow? and where did you come from? Deary me! poor things, hear them sob! Don't weep, darlings, for Aunt Sabina'll comfort you, and pray for you. I know these men won't hurt angels such as you; but then"—and she gave herself a jerk, and flashed a fierce look around her—"men are mean, cruel, heartless critters. I was young and beautiful once like you, gals—folks said I was the belle of Blackberry Ridge, but the deceit of man robbed me of my charms and made me a poor, lone, deserted old woman; but, please the gracious Mawster, a day of reckoning is comin'!"

The old woman sat down and conversed freely with the girls for several minutes, though Sky Traveler took a position where he could hear every word. In fact, the villain did not feel easy with her about, but then, being dependent upon the Blackfeet, he dare not insist upon her removal through fear of incurring their displeasure. However, the woman said nothing to which the renegade could take the least exception, notwithstanding her words gave the girls great hope and comfort.

A peculiar noise outside finally drew the woman away from the girls and going to where the Indians were, she found them overhauling a lot of plunder

taken from the cabin of Sparrowhawk. Among the things that excited most curiosity was a Spanish guitar. The red-skins handled it as if it had been a bubble. They put out their fingers slowly and cautiously and touched it—starting back with a smile, half fear and half fascination, at the sound it gave forth.

Sabina watched them for some time, amused at their childish curiosity; but finally she advanced, and taking the instrument from their hands, exclaimed:

"Wisdom of Solomon! you don't know what that critter's made for, I see. Please gracious, I can make her sing a perfect streak."

Tipping her bonnet back, and rolling her eyes up in a thoughtful manner as if to recall something familiar, she ran her fingers over the strings, producing a combination of sounds sweet and harmonious. The Indians started back, then advanced only to recoil again with a strange commingling of fear and fascination.

"Ah!" sneered the disguised white man, "I see you are a musician, Mrs. Sabina."

"Yes, sir, I used to be a splendid musikan, and I could sing like a lark, and dance like a fairy. Many's the time old Kit Columbus Bandy's sot and talked 'bout my fingers flashin' 'long the strings like ripples of sunshine, and my voice soundin' like the sweet breathin's of a Moorish maid, and my figure floatin' like a dove's on the waves of the music as I whirled and circled in the tangled mazes of an Old Virginny reel. Oh, that day is past now; but it's a fact, there wasn't a girl in all the Yuba valley that could hold a candle to me dancin' 'Jim-along-Josie' and in cuttin' a 'Pigeon-wing.' But that dispoiler of maiden innocent, Kit C. Bandy, come along and spoil it all; but please gracious, my friends, I—"

Here the old woman struck the strings to give expression to the violence of her feelings, and before the discord had died away her fingers began running over the strings, and to the surprise of the renegade, calling forth sounds of wild, strange melody. The maidens, as well as their captors, were surprised by it. Never, in all their lives, it seemed, had they heard such enchanting music. Perhaps it was all the more wonderful for being in such a strange contrast with their desolate surroundings. Sky Traveler was compelled to unbend in his arrogance to the old woman, and advancing, he listened to the music as though its notes brought up some happy recollections of the past. The red-skins, too, gathered around the musician and listened as though transported by the rapturous sound. The very air seemed rife with enchantment, and it was several minutes before any one stirred. When the old woman saw that the spell was wearing off—that her auditors were stirring—she lent the music of her voice in an accompaniment with the guitar, and again riveted the attention of her audience. The music was a wild, weird refrain, and as its last sad, soft note died away, and the savages, in silent wonder, lifted their eyes, a change seemed to come over them—a dark mist seemed to obscure their vision and blend light and shadows in one general darkness.

The moon had sunk behind the horizon, and the haze of autumn made the starlight dim.

Sky Traveler cast a glance around him and then said:

"Now, red-skins, is the time to act. It'll not be long until daylight. I believe I will go myself to the Blackfoot camp."

He took his rifle and walked down to the water's edge. The chief went with him. The water gave forth a dim, phosphorescent glow. Sky Traveler searched for a canoe, but failed to find one. They had all been tied up to the willows upon landing. The renegade and chief made the circuit of the island, but found not a single boat. Every one of them had been mysteriously and silently spirited away.

An oath burst from the lips of the white man. Like a mad bull he went crashing back to the center of the island. He tore aside the top of the maidens' tent and stepped inside. It was empty. He sounded the alarm.

A yell of dismay burst from the lips of the warriors.

Foaming with rage, Sky Traveler went charging across the island with drawn pistol.

"Where is that accursed woman? I will murder the vagrant! She is the cause of all!"

But Sabina was not there, but from far down the river came a voice singing in plaintive tones the words:

"It's over the river and over the sea,
And it's over the water to Kit-si-ee."

CHAPTER XIX.

WALLED IN.

FROM the shore Kit Bandy and Old Arkansaw watched Sabina until she had reached the island and disappeared among the shrubbery.

"Now, Arkie," said Kit, slapping his friend upon the shoulder, "if them Ingins don't scalp that woman inside of half an hour, we can board that island. Because, Arkie, she'll create a diversion among the Blackhoofs that'll jist set 'em crazy, if she's at herself, and she alers is. The way the water runs I believe we can wade to the island, and if so, we can make it like a flirt."

"Wal, the old woman's havin' a reception now over thar, judgin' by the racket, and I'm ready for any thing, don't care what it is, so thar's fun and adventer in it."

The two arranged their weapons and ammunition to keep them dry, then descended the bank and waded into the water. The moon had just gone down. The wild strains of music were now floating over from the island, and, judging by the silence of the red-skins, this was the opportune moment, and

the two scouts entered the water and pressed toward the island. To their surprise they found the water shallower than they had hoped to find it; and side by side they finally reached the island.

"Now, Arkie, you hold yourself here as a reserve force, and I'll advance and feel the enemy's strength and open the battle," whispered Bandy, to whom Arkansaw replied with a nudge of the elbow.

Upon his hands and knees the old scout crept carefully toward the center of the island. The strains of Sabina's music drowned all sounds he created, and so he soon found himself within twenty feet of the red-skins, who were grouped around the musician. Spying out the captives' tent, as he supposed, he made his way to the rear of it, lifted the blanket and put his head inside.

The maidens were so enraptured by the presence and accomplishments of old Sabina that they, too, were totally unconscious of the presence of any one till a hand touched Hellice's arm. She started as though it had been the touch of a serpent, and uttered a little cry that would have been heard by the Indians but for the noise outside.

A voice in a whisper at once quieted her fears. "Silence, gals," it said, "I'm a friend—come quick—be quiet as shadders—foller me—I'm Kit Bandy."

A quiver ran through the captives' frames, and swallowing back the lump in their throats, they rose to their feet. Without a word or a single doubt in her mind, Hellice placed her little hand in the extended paw of the old man, and permitted herself to be drawn from the lodge, grasping Elwe's hand as she passed out.

Together the three crept down to the water's edge and with no little noise, for the girls were terribly excited. They found Arkansaw in waiting, and at once proceeded to embark for safer quarters.

The red-skins' canoes lay at their right, and placing the girls in one of them, Kit stepped in also, expecting Arkansaw to follow. But instead, the borderman pushed their boat out into the stream, remaining upon the island. As there was no time for Kit to inquire into his movements, the old man took up the paddle and sent the long canoe gliding down the stream.

Meanwhile, Old Arkansaw was busy. He cut the painters of three canoes and sent them adrift, and boarded the fourth one and attempted to follow Bandy and the girls.

Every vestige of light had now disappeared, and Arkansaw could scarcely see the forward end of his canoe; but, confident of overtaking Kit, he pulled rapidly along the south shore for several minutes; but, to his surprise, failed to come up with his friends. To his fear and wonder, however, he suddenly became aware that a canoe was following him. He could hear the dip of a paddle and the swash of the water around the gliding craft, and it now became a question whether it was Kit and the girls whom he had got in ahead of, or whether it was Indians following him. He dare not run the risk of a challenge under the circumstances, and so hugging the shore closely, he continued on down the river.

Finally he ran in close against the bank, and stopping, threw himself prostrate on his back in the canoe. The dip of that following paddle sounded near, and a canoe came creeping alongside of his so close that the sides rubbed together. At the same moment Old Arkansaw felt the fingers of an extended hand come in contact with his face, and his mouth being partly open he seized a finger of the inquisitive hand and closed his vise-like jaws upon it. A cry escaped the unknown lips, and a voice yelled out in sudden pain:

"Shoot, Silver Star! the devil's got my hand in—"

"Hold up, Silver Star!—it's me—Old Arkansaw Abe," said the old borderman, rising to a sitting posture.

"Ay, it is!" exclaimed the familiar voice of the Boy Knight; "that was Sparrowhawk's hand you were trying to swallow."

"Beg pardon, Sparryhawk; 's'posed it war the tentacle of a red-skin. By the love of Moses, boys, I'm glad to meet you; but whar the deuce you been?"

"We were lying in one of those canoes you sent adrift from the island, waiting our chance to bounce the Indians," replied Silver Star; "we swam there from the north shore, and were never so mad in all our lives as when you sent us adrift. I fairly gnawed the boat; but believing you were there to rescue the girls we kept quiet and followed you; but I see you have not the girls."

"No; Old Kit Columbus Bandy took 'em and lent out with 'em like oiled lightnin'. I thought I'd overtake 'em, but haven't for some reason or other. They must 'a' landed back up the stream."

"Kit Bandy!" exclaimed Silver Star; "has that man those girls in his power?"

"Yes; and a royal good—"

"He is an infernal old traitor, Arkansaw! he is in league with the Sioux Indians!" Silver Star interrupted.

"Wal, he is a queer old codger, Silver, but I guess he's all right; we'll risk it anyhow."

"You will find he is not when too late, Arkansaw: I would rather see those girls in the power of the Blackfeet than of Kit Bandy, for then there would be some hope for them."

"If what my friend here tells me is true, Arkansaw, and I do not doubt his word, Bandy is an infamous old scoundrel, deep-dyed and two-faced," added Sparrowhawk, with a calm deliberate tone, that told the depth of his feeling.

"Well, true or not Kit's got them angels, and the fust thing for us to do is to hunt 'em up. I'm really glad to meet you, boys, for I war afeard you'd got cooked in the swamp to-night. Let's git onto terra firmy and git our bearin's. How's your wounded shin, Silver Star?"

"It is not well, though I am using it just the same."

The three went ashore, and after a few moments' deliberation, set off in search of Kit Bandy and the maidens.

Meanwhile, Old Kit and his fair companions were some distance from there and the river. Fearing discovery, the old man landed as soon as he was fairly out of gunshot of the island, though it was the very worst thing he could have done, for the canoe being found by the Indians, put the red-skins upon their trail.

"Now, little 'uns," the old man said as he pulled the canoe ashore, "we'll all hop out and make fur tall timber on the double-quick. Old Arkansaw's somewhars about, but I'm afeard we've got lost from him."

He assisted the girls to land, and then, placing one upon each side of him, and drawing an arm of each in his, he set off into the woods at a brisk walk. Not a word was spoken for fully an hour, and even then the silence would not have been broken had it not been for the labored breathing of the maidens.

"Horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Kit, all of a sudden, "I expect I am husselin' you little critters 'long too fast, ar'n't I?"

"I am getting so tired!" replied Elwe, in a short breath.

"We have traveled very fast," said Hellice, panting.

"Oh, dear! I'm ashamed of myself, gals," said Kit, in a tone of contrition; "I never once thought but what you could go as fast as me. You see, I'm not up to weemen-folks like some fellers are. I've see'd a deal of life—rough-and-tumble life—but I never had any 'sperience with angels sich as you. Here, now, let's set down and take a good rest."

They sat down upon a fallen log, when old Kit opened upon the girls with a volley of questions. The maidens were amused at the old man's odd ways, whimsical expressions and the tenderness with which he inquired after their comfort. He assured them that they need have no fears—that he would die for them, if need be—that the highest honor ever conferred upon him was the privilege of fighting for woman's life and honor.

The distant howl of a wolf suddenly broke the quiet of their repose, and sent a shudder through the forms of the girls.

"Don't let that skeer ye, gals," said Kit; "thar's not wolves enough to eat you this side of the Rockies, as long as my head's hot. If you are to be eat by a wolf, I'd like to be the wolf; but, by the horn of Joshua! I wish daylight 'd hurry up."

"Yes," said Hellice, "and with the darkness, perhaps, would go some of the terror that is born of night."

"And others would come, little woman; daylight 'll reveal to you the fact that I'm a terror—as ugly an old sinner as you ever sot eyes onto. And it's a fact, gals, I used to be married to—"

"Yes, your wife was on the island to-night. At least she called herself Sabina Bandy. It was she who bewitched, with guitar and voice the Indians," said Hellice.

"Yes, gals, that was her—Ellen Sabina Bandy, one of the most relentless old souls that ever dashed a skillet into one's diogony, or raked bowler from taw. he's a perfect Rocky Mountain screamer, and all Satan's host can't he'd her off. She routed me years ago, hoss and foot, and I'll be blest if she ar'n't goin' to keep up the pursuit like the ghost of a dead creditor. Oh, she's pizen! she's a terror by the clock, even if she did you gals a good turn by holdin' the Indians while Arkansaw and me lifted you out of danger; but if she'd 'a' known that she war goin' to place you 'uns in my company she'd 'a' seen you fryin' afore she'd 'a' done what she did. Horn of Joshua! if she knowed I war settin' here with a purty gal on each side of me, I'll bet she'd bu'st every pucker-string 'bout her garments, for it'd be jist like her."

"She seems to have some accomplishments," said Elwe; "she is a splendid musician."

"Oh, yes, and she's a 'complished dictionary of red-hot words, too. Oh, sich a tongue! Why, she's act'y put two hundred words to the minute at me, hissin' hot. I've see'd her tongue smoke with friction it run so fast."

"I am afraid you do your wife injustice, Mr. Bandy," said Hellice.

"Mebby I do, little one, but jist wait till you meet her when she's in a weavin' way, and hear her buckle right down to work, and if you don't give up she's a clipper-on-the-Wabash. I'll vote myself a fraud and a failure. She's the jealousist critter that war ever born, and if you'd see me in the daylight you'd laff yourself into fits to think that any one'd be jealous of as ugly an old stick as I be. Why, I am tall as a bean-pole and angular as a sick elk; I've got a mouth like a tunnel and ears like a jack-rabbit, and my face's all tracked over with crows' feet. That's how I look, and I'm not afeard of either of you gals fallin' in love with me."

Thus Old Kit's tongue ran on incessantly. It helped the maidens to forget their danger, and more than once were they forced to laugh outright at his odd speeches. But, this was just what the old man wanted. He knew nothing would be so conducive to confidence and good cheer as a revival of their drooping spirits; and as they resumed their journey, he drew them into conversation, and ere they were aware of the fact they were miles from the White Earth river.

At length day began to dawn, and, finally, the red bars of light quivering athwart the eastern sky burst into flame. Morning, with the fresh ripe fragrance of the woods, was upon them.

Kit concealed the girls in a thicket where the warm sun could bathe their white, fair faces and delicate forms, and went in search of some game

for breakfast. He was gone over three hours, but when he returned he brought venison enough, already broiled, to last them a week.

"Why, Kit!" exclaimed Hellice, "we were afraid you were in trouble, you were gone so long."

"I was afraid you'd be uneasy, little 'uns; but I shot a deer down the country, and roasted a good share of it by a deserted camp-fire, and it took me some time to do it. And I'm sorry to tell you, little 'uns, but I'm awfully afraid thar's Ingins 'bout here. I am, by the horn of Joshua!"

"Oh, dear! will we never get out of danger?" cried Elwe.

"In course we will—you're out of it now; but the only difficulty is to keep out. But, I'll look well to you gals. I'd jist as lief lay this old body down right here fightin' for you gals as any thing else on earth. It'd do my soul good to die for a pair of pet angels jist like you 'uns. Bless my stars! I'm not handsome, I'll admit, but blamed if I can't fight like a wild-cat. But here now, gals, take a hold of this meat and eat like a pair of hungry cub bears—it'll do you good. I'm awful glad I struck that Ingins camp-fire, for we won't have to make a fire to attract attention."

The three ate their breakfast with a keen relish, and after the meal was concluded, Kit said:

"Now, little 'uns, I'm goin' to run out and make a keeful reconnoissance of the situation, and see that thar's no sign of red-skins about before we venture out! If thar isn't we'll shape our course to 'rd the nearest tradin'-post."

He went away, having first moved the girls to a concealment under a ledge of high rocks with an open valley before them. He had been gone but a few minutes when a huge gray wolf came trotting across the valley, and striking their trail, stopped and sniffed the air, then gave utterance to a low, whining wail that gradually changed into a sharp, gibbering cry that grated harshly upon the ears of the timid girls. And it was immediately answered by a neighbor wolf from up the valley, and presently he, too, came trotting down, and joined his companion; and then together the two set up a discordant yelping and howling that seemed to come from a hundred different throats.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Elwe, with a shudder, "I wish Kit would hurry back. I am afraid those horrid beasts will attack us, Hellice!"

"Be of good cheer, sweet sister," said the noble Hellice, "God will watch over us in the future as in the past. He has been exceedingly kind to us."

"I know it, Hellice," replied Elwe; "but when I think of my situation now and of but a week ago—think of how my friends—hundreds of miles from here—are mourning my absence, and perhaps my death, I cannot feel otherwise than sad."

"I do not doubt you, Elwe; but just as soon as we are out of our present dangers, I will tell Kit Bandy all about your mysterious abduction, and I know he will see that you are taken safely back to your friends. Or if brother Pau—I mean Sparrowhawk, has escaped with his life we will see that you are taken home."

A smile of joy lit up the fair face of Elwe at the mention of Sparrowhawk's name. Hellice did not fail to notice it, despite her own embarrassment caused by her almost speaking the name of her brother—a name at which she shuddered.

A dozen wolves skirmishing around them, with others coming, began to impress both the girls with a strong sense of fear, and by the time Kit had returned, a score of the shaggy, snarling beasts were in sight.

The old man frightened them off, but they soon returned reinforced, and the stronger they became the closer they advanced, and the bolder they grew.

"Blast and wither the riotin' varmints," old Kit finally exclaimed, "they act as though determined to have some angel meat for dinner; but they'll have to chaw some tough sinner afore they git at the relishes, now mind. Don't you be skeered, little 'uns, they're cowardly critters, even if they do present a bold front and hungry maw. If I only dare shoot a few of them the others 'd go away; but I'm afraid to fire my gun for fear it's report 'll bring a pack of Ingins down upon us. Thar's a pack of the red vagrants about, and I wish to glory that these wolves would hunt them up and chaw their heads off close to their tarnal heels."

It was apparent to the more observant Hellice that Kit Bandy felt more uneasiness than he was willing to manifest. In truth the old man did everything within his power to conceal the real danger that menaced them, for there was not only danger in the presence of the howling pack before them, but of their frightful din attracting Indians to the spot to ascertain the cause. Already he recognized the fact that it would be suicide to attempt to leave their retreat, for the wolves would at once close in around them. As it was, the rock protected them on one side; and Kit knew that a wolf was slow to attack a person from before. Like a coward, they usually attacked in the rear.

Hour after hour wore away without any material change in the situation, though, to Kit, it was obviously growing worse all the time. Noon came and passed, and as the sun declined westward, the old man began to manifest some outward uneasiness. He knew that, with the coming of night, the wolves would increase in number, and attack them. To get away with the maidens was next thing to impossible, for here and there upon the surrounding hills and ledges, lynx-eyed wolves lay keeping a ceaseless watch upon the valley.

"Gals," the old man finally remarked, "I've got to git out of this or the Ingins and wolves together will gobble us up. I've got an idea in my head that I think 'll work like a charm—in fact, I think it is

our only salvation. I'm goin' to pen you women up here, and then run for help, or draw the wolves away, or do somethin' to save you."

"Oh, dear! is it possible that we are in such a desperate situation as that, Kit?" cried Elwe.

"Now, don't go to takin' on, Elwe; for the love of Moses keep cool and brave. I can't stand it to see tears—they melt me right down. But I'll make you safe, rest assured, and now I'll show you how I'll do it."

He laid aside his rifle and went to work. Before them the valley lay strewn with broken rocks from the size of a man's head to blocks as large as Kit could lift. The largest of these the old man gathered up and began building a barricade in front and around the maidens, the ledge serving as the rear wall. Stone after stone he carried and layed up in regular layers, the top layer breaking joints with the lower. He selected the smoothest and squarest stones, so that when his work was completed there was not a hole large enough for one of the girls to put her hand out. The structure was almost as solid as rock could make it. The top of the wall came square up against the shelving ledge, and was so firm that a hundred wolves could not move a stone.

The old man was highly pleased with his work, and notwithstanding he had to quit his labors several times to fight the wolves, he felt that the girls were safe for the time being.

"What do you think of that for an angel-cage, gals?" he asked, when done.

"The wolves cannot reach us here, I feel certain," said Hellice. "Oh, Kit! you are very good and kind to us."

"I'm glad to know you feel safe; and, now, I'm goin' to make a break and git out of this. I may be gone all night—mebby longer, no tellin'. If I can't find friends enuff to git you through to the fort or a post I'll go clear to the fort for soldiers. Now you must be brave, gals, and keep up courage. When you feel like cryin', sing; when you feel like screamin', pray. God 'll hear you. He will not turn a deaf ear to the prayers of a pair of angels, I know, for He's often heard and granted even Old Kit Bandy's prayers. The wolves 'll be apt to come up to the wall and tear and cavort around like a pack of hornets locked out of their nest; but let 'em cavort. Laugh at 'em, whistle at 'em, but don't git skeered. You have venison enough to last you two or three days, and here is one of my hunting-knives to slice it with. You can 'muse yourselves, if you want to, ticklin' the noses of the wolves with the knife when they come up sniffin' round the cracks. Now, it'll soon be dark and gloomy here, and the music you'll hear won't be as sweet as that dispensed by Sabina on the island last night; but, just assure yourselves you're right, and laugh and sing and pray for all that's out. I'm goin' to try and scale this cliff, for I know the wolves can't foller me, only by goin' around a long way; so good-by, girls, and may God keep and protect your sweet little souls."

"Good-by, Kit; Heaven speed you!" came from within the stony barricade.

The next moment the nimble-footed old man was scrambling up the steep acclivity, and the girls realized that they were alone with the wolves.

The beasts set up a frightful noise when they saw a part of their quarry climbing the rock, and surged forward like a wave, as if to follow him; but, failing in this, they turned and attacked the maidens' defense with the fury of demons possessed.

And thus night fell upon the valley and over the land.

CHAPTER XX.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

In the shadows of night alone there were a thousand horrors to the frail, timid girls penned up by the stone wall there in the deep solitude of the forest; but the great mass of wolves now fighting and snarling around them filled their young hearts with new-born terrors. They could see, through the cracks in the wall, the eyes of the beasts floating about like beads of fire in the darkness; they could hear their teeth grinding and grating upon the rocks as they endeavored to gnaw their way through the wall; they could feel the hot breath of the beasts upon their very faces breathed through the openings in the wall; and when the moon came up they could see the pack of shaggy forms crowding and leaping and fighting around them like the black sediments of a boiling caldron.

Trembling and frightened the girls still shrunk from the terrible sights and sounds. They could not converse for the noise around them was so loud that they could not make each other heard, and locked in each other's embrace, they shrunk cowering against the ledge, watching with wildly-staring eyes before them. They remembered Old Kit's injunctions and tried to sing, but this seemed mockery. They prayed long and fervently, and in this alone was there relief.

A peculiar, scratching and snarling sound suddenly caught Hellice's ear, and casting her eyes downward she uttered a wild scream. Under the bottom of the wall—just within their retreat—she saw a pair of blazing orbs. She knew what they were. The eyes of a wolf. The beast had made a hole almost large enough to admit its body, by digging in under the wall.

"Oh, my God, Elwe!" she screamed in Elwe's ear, "The wolves are undermining the wall! One is almost in!"

Elwe could only reply in sobs that seemed to issue from her very heart.

Hellice happened to think of the knife Kit had given them, and taking this she advanced, half-bending, toward the wolf, that was slowly twisting and

working its way into their retreat. She raised the knife but her heart failed her, and she staggered back half-fainting. Still the hungry beast scratched and growled and writhed in its desperation. Inch by inch it was working its way in.

Hellice rallied her courage. She saw at once that for this beast to enter would be to admit others, and summoning all her courage and strength into one desperate effort, she again advanced, and this time drove the knife into the beast's shaggy neck.

A frightful and half-human cry of agony burst from the animal's throat; but, Hellice had now overcome her timidity and fear, and a desperate resolve took possession of her—fired her very soul and gave the strength of a giant to her body. Again and again she plunged the knife into the animal's neck and in a moment more it was dead, the body blocking the hole it had made.

Hellice now felt that she was, indeed, a heroine. Her act of daring inspired her with hope, and she endeavored by brave words, to infuse some of her own new-born spirit into the breast of her little companion.

Thus the hours wore on. The girls finally discovered that the ravenous beasts outside were devouring the body of their mate wedged under the wall. They could smell the hot, sickish odor of blood and hear them rending the quivering flesh. Presently the head was drawn outward and the hole was again open. But it remained so only for a moment, for another wolf thrust its nose under the wall and attempted to enter. But Hellice dealt it a blow with the knife that caused it to retreat with a cry of pain. One after another of the determined brutes attempted to enter, but all promptly received the same terrible reception at the hand of the brave Hellice the moment the green, glaring eyes appeared within.

On the whole, the situation was gradually developing into a kind of a fascinating horror to the maidens. They had begun to feel more self-confidence—experience a sense of relief in the midst of peril, when suddenly the clash of firearms, the wild shouts of men and the screams of wounded wolves made the night hideous. Then the glare of burning torches lit up the valley, and like frightened sheep the wolves went scampering away across the little plateau into the woods beyond.

"Oh, Elwe!" shouted Hellice, clapping her hands with joy; "friends have come! friends have come!"

"Oh dear! Good old Kit has brought them!" exclaimed Elwe, her pretty, childish face aglow with tremulous joy. "Just see the wolves scampering away, Hellice! and hear the men shooting them! See! they have torches! Oh, I do wonder if Sparrowhawk and brave Silver Star is with them?"

"No doubt of it, sweet sister, and if so, won't this be a joyous meeting? Look! the light is coming nearer—its rays are streaming into our prison—I can see your face, Elwe. Oh, what horrors there are in darkness; but we'll soon be safe and free, dear friend."

"Our prayers have been heard, Hellice, as Kit told us they would be. I shall never forget to pray for the old scout. What a brave, odd, stormy old fellow he is—ah, listen! they're talking—they've come up—what strange voices, Hellice!"

Hellice advanced and peered out through a crack in the wall.

She staggered back and almost fell under the shock she received.

"Oh my God, my God, Elwe!" burst from her lips.

"What, Hellice—what is it, sister?" cried Elwe.

"Oh, my poor little friend!" Hellice replied, in a half-smothered cry, "they are not friends—they are Indians! We are lost! lost! God have mercy upon us!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TAKING UP THE TRAIL.

The ring of horses' hoofs broke clear upon the morning air, as through the valley of the White Earth four men rode at a wild, breakneck speed.

Upon the breast of one of them burned a silver star—upon the face of each burned a light of wild anxiety, as he urged his foaming beast forward with a cruel impatience.

He who rode in advance was none other than Silver Star, the Boy Knight, and those who followed him were Sparrowhawk, Old Arkansaw and Kit Bandy. All were headed for the valley wherein Bandy had left Hellice and Elwe imprisoned from the ravenous wolves.

After Old Arkansaw had fallen in with Sparrowhawk and Silver Star, the three in hopes of finding Bandy and the girls, continued on down the river until they were met by a company of soldiers under Captain Bland. The latter did not know whether Arkansaw and the Boy Knight had escaped or not, the night of the attack upon the peninsula, but determined to know it, if they were alive, they had set out in search of them. And during the search they came suddenly upon a party of five mounted savages, the leader of whom, a young chief, seemed to have assumed the mantle of the supposed dead Silver Star, for he was not only mounted upon the Boy Knight's white horse, but wore his helmet, carried his fine repeating breech-loading rifle, and sported the youth's spy-glass—all of which had been captured on the peninsula.

Every savage was killed, and the property of the Boy Knight recovered, which proved a fortunate event, for the next night they met the youth, Bandy, Arkansaw and Sparrowhawk, and were enabled to provide each with a horse from the captured outfit.

As soon as they were mounted, the four struck out up the valley to the relief of the maidens, the soldiers returning to the fort, Kit having assured the captain that the four would be a sufficient force to bring the girls in with safety.

A feeling of wild joy took possession of our gallant young hero when he was once more permitted to mount his favorite horse and go plunging away over hill and valley—and that, too, to the rescue of the fair Hellice and Elwe. Nor was Sparrowhawk any less exuberant in spirit. He, too, sat his horse with the air of a wild and dashing young cavalier going to do battle for his lady love.

Kit Bandy assured the young men that the girls would be found safe, though surrounded by dangers; and it was with the greatest anxiety and burning impatience that they galloped forward.

On down steep declivities, over rough, rocky valley and deep ravines—through the mazes of tangled wild-wood—on with a never-ceasing gait they plunged headlong at the risk of their lives.

The spirited horse of Silver Star being possessed of far greater speed than the Indian ponies bestrode by his friends, the lad took the lead, old Kit guiding him upon his course by a wave of the hand.

The sun was nearly an hour high when old Kit suddenly called out:

"Bear to the right, Silver Star, and draw up when you reach the little valley with a ledge of rocks on the right."

Silver Star wheeled around to the right and a few rods further on drew rein under the shadows of an almost perpendicular cliff.

Kit and the others came up and drew rein by his side.

One glance around him, and at the base of the rock, and a groan escaped the old man's lips. It told a fearful tale.

"Oh, great horn of Joshua!" he exclaimed, in a spirit of agony; "we're too late, boys! the girls are gone! There—right whar you see that tumbled-down mass of rock is where I left them. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

Sparrowhawk grew white and fairly reeled in his saddle, while Silver Star, throwing himself to the ground, wept with bitter and heartfelt disappointment.

A deep hush fell upon the valley, that was only broken by the panting of the hard-riden horses.

Kit dismounted and examined the place where he had left the girls. He felt satisfied the wall had been pulled down by human hands, and was about to speak to his companion on the subject when Arkansaw asked:

"What means these bones, Kit? They're not human, are they?"

"No, they're the bones of a wolf that have been stripped by the teeth of others. But who killed it I am unable to say. There is not a doubt in my mind, however, but that the Ingins have been here—that they slew the wolf and took the girls."

"Ah's me! I fear not, Kit, look here," said Arkansaw, and he picked up a strip of cloth which Sparrowhawk at once recognized as a piece of his sister's dress.

"Oh, merciful Heaven!" the young recluse exclaimed, bitterly, sorrowfully; "that tells the whole horrible story: my poor sister has been devoured by the wolves!"

Silver Star subdued his outburst of grief and began searching the ground for further evidence of the maidens' death. Out several steps from the rock he found a little blue kid boot—one he had seen upon Elwe's foot. It was torn and bloody. Further on he found a piece of a shell-comb and a pearl button and finally a tangled, disordered ringlet of hair, which Sparrowhawk decided had come from his sister's head. It, too, was dabbled with blood, and dispelled the last hope from the brother's heart. He sat down and gave way to the bitterest emotions, while Silver Star walked off to one side where he could brood over his grief alone.

Kit and Arkansaw continued to search the ground for further evidence, although there was not much doubt in the mind of either but that the torn shoe, the bloody ringlet, and the other articles of dress found, settled the question of the girls' terrible fate.

"I left them right thar," said Kit, indicating the place, "and I built up a firm wall around them that it seems impossible for wolves or bears to have moved. You can see the size of the stone I used. I was just as honest in the belief that they were safe, as I ever was in anything in all my tumultuous life. I done the best I could. We could never have got away alive, that I knew; but I wish now that I'd stayed and died with them: or, if it'd been me instead of them it'd been better. I'm old and almost playin' my last trump, while they were young and full of life, and had somethin' to live for. Ah, me! ah, me!"

"I don't doubt, Kit," said Sparrowhawk, seeing how badly the old man felt, "but you did the best you could, and that is better than any of the rest of us could have done; but, oh, heavens! it is a sad and terrible blow."

"Ah, what's this?" suddenly called out Silver Star, who had stolen back to the ledge, and whose keen eyes—through a mist of tears—had discovered some marks on the smooth face of the overhanging rock.

Arkansaw, turning and stooping slightly, glanced at the marks indicated, with brows contracted.

"It's some kind o' readin'," he said, "jist like's on the rocks in New Mexico—inscriptions that nobody can read."

"No, it's not! no, it's not!" shouted Old Kit. "Boys, by the holy horn of Joshua, here is light—light on the subject! Glory to King David! Sound the glad hosannahs; the girls are not dead!"

A breathless silence fell upon the little party. The words of the old man were too good to believe—they sounded like hollow mockery—sacrilegious. But every eye turned toward him, and saw him pointing, with his long bony finger, toward the words that had been scratched with the point of a knife upon the smooth surface of the rock. His

lips opened, and as his finger traced each word, he read aloud:

"Indians tearing down wall. Follow trail. HELICE."

There was no longer any doubt in the breasts of the little party, and a shout, wild and prolonged, rung through the woods.

Old Kit tossed his cap in the air and in mad delight fired his revolver at it. He hugged Old Arkansaw and shook hands with the boys, while tears of pure joy ran down his brown, wrinkled face.

Sparrowhawk and Silver Star, too, evinced their feelings in demonstrations and in antics quite as childish as Old Kit's. Finally, Silver Star vaulted into his saddle and shouted:

"Mount, boys, and let's follow the red thieves to the end of the earth!"

"Hold on thar, youngster," cried old Kit, in an expostulating way; "you don't want to git frantic and bust yer b'iler. Git intirely over yer excitement afore you start out, for we're now goin' on a trip that'll require the greatest silence and knowledge and everything else. I know you're hard to beat for a boy, but then you go off half-cocked once in a while, I see. If you'd see'd as much of married life as me, you'd be calm, sober and sedate as the Sphinx. I reckon you're not in love with both of 'em gals, be you? Heavens, boy, if ye are, ye must be equal to old Solomon, who divided his love up 'mong seven hundred wives. Heavens! he hadn't nary Sabina 'mong the gang, or else he'd 'a' thought one was too many. Oh, I do wish the Ingins would steal that old woman off; but then the Ingins are no fools if—if—"

"You have been," Arkansaw added.

"Well, boys, facts are facts, and it's no use tryin' to fool with the argumentative end of a mule; so we might as well be upon the move. The fust thing wanted is the trail, and then if we don't double on 'em it will be funny."

Old Arkansaw left his pony in the care of Silver Star and struck out in search of the trail, going in a circuit around the little valley. He had not been out more than ten minutes when a sharp whistle announced the discovery of the trail, and going to where he was, the four at once took their departure.

The steps led north, and all but Silver Star, whose ankle would not permit of fast walking, took their turn in walking and following the trace. They traveled on until the river was reached, when the trail ended; but satisfied that the Indians were Blackfeet heading for their own country away to the northward, the pursuers crossed the river and took up the trail on the opposite shore.

Continuing north, the steps passed from the valley of the White Earth, beyond its wooded bluffs and out into the almost interminable expanse of prairie stretching toward the Big Cheyenne river.

The plain was a succession of short, wave-like ridges and narrow valleys, without a shrub or spear of grass upon it. Just the night before a fire had swept over it, leaving it a black, trackless waste, without an object to break its dreary monotony to be seen upon it.

The trail of the savages was plain enough in the black ashes, and there was no need of a man walking to follow it. On the contrary it was so plain that they could follow it at a brisk gallop, and did so with Silver Star, upon his trained horse, taking the lead.

The enemy or most of them, were afoot, though the tracks of horses could be seen now and then in the yielding soil. As to the number of the red-skins, there was no way of determining, inasmuch as they traveled Indian file—stepping in each other's tracks.

The October day was warm, dry and windy. The blue haze of Indian summer, thickened by the flying black ashes of the burnt plain, rendered the heavens dark and sullen. Now and then great clouds of ashes came sweeping over the waste before the wind, twisting and writhing, rising and falling, like shapeless demons, and almost blinding the pursuers, and rendering it difficult to breathe.

Still they pressed on. Silver Star now kept his glass to his eyes most of the time, for it was difficult to see far with the naked eye; besides, there was no telling what moment they would come upon the Indians among the short, choppy waves of that turbulent ocean of prairie.

The little cavalcade presented a strange appearance as it swept on over the plain. The black dust settling upon the men's faces rendered them dark and grim. Silver Star, still in advance, leaned slightly forward in his stirrups with his keen eyes fixed upon the trail. In one hand he held the rein, in the other his spyglass. At his back was slung the trusty breech-loader with which he had won fame as an unerring shot.

Kit and Arkansaw presented a ludicrous appearance, as, mounted upon the low, short Indian ponies, their long legs dangling almost to the ground, they galloped along.

Old Kit would have his fun and crack his jokes despite the solemnity of the occasion and the feelings of his friends. No one could grow sad and melancholy in his company, even had it been their desire to do so.

Thus they moved.

Ever and anon Silver Star started up and swept the plain before him with his glass.

Those following had nothing to do but urge their ponies on after the noble gray and his young master.

The sun shining red through the dark mist, had crossed the meridian, and Silver Star was riding a few rods in advance, when all of a sudden both horse and rider sunk to earth as if stricken down by an invisible hand.

"Great horn of Joshua! what does that mean?"

exclaimed Old Kit, and he was about to put spur and hurry forward, when Silver Star, rising to his knees, motioned to his companion to stop.

In the valley before him, not over a quarter of a mile away, he had discovered the Indians!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WHIRLWIND.

For fully ten minutes Silver Star and his horse lay prone upon the earth; but when the Indians had passed from view behind a ridge, he rose to his feet and spoke to his trained animal, and the next instant it was up also. Then his companions rode up to where he stood.

"Have you eurekaed them, Silver?" asked Kit.

"I have seen the Indians, if that's what you mean," replied Silver Star.

"Good! bravo!" exclaimed Sparrowhawk; "have they got the girls, Silver Star?"

"I couldn't tell whether they had or not, Sparrowhawk; there were about thirty persons all told. Four of them were mounted and every one of them wrapped up in blankets from head to foot."

"Well, dod-drot the luck," growled old Kit; "but the chances are that the gals are bundled up on the hosses; but how are we to git 'em?"

"Charge upon them," suggested Arkansaw.

"That would be sheer folly and sure death," replied Silver Star; "thirty of them and four of us are too great a odds. We have got to try and circumvent them."

"That's it, by the horn of Joshua! The fust thing to be did is to find out whether the gals are with them, and the only way that can be done is to go right in among them. I'll do the goin', too—make them believe I come into their midst a purpose—that I never mistrusted them of wrong in the world. Mebby by doin' the thing up brown, I can bluff them into believin' me a friend, if there's no one there that knows me. If they conclude to take me off my hoss and peel my pate, why, you can jist bet they'll have haydoogins of fun afore they git through. If they let me go, well and good, and if they conclude to waltz me home with them—well, I'll have to do the best I can, that's all. But I'm willin' to die for them gals, I don't keer how it comes. You see I can cackle the Blackfoot tongue like sixty, and that'll help me out. I'll git away 'round ahead of them, and then turn tail and come dashin' down from the north like an innocent snowflake."

"That'll be a dangerous experiment, Kitsie," said Old Arkansaw, "and it's only yer nateral beauty that'll save your life. You look like the god of battles on that hoss."

"Thanks, Arky, for the compliment; and should I never get back, understand that I give and bequath all my right, title and interest in my wife Sabina, to my beloved friend Arkansaw Abe, to be his'n till death does them part."

The boys enjoyed a laugh at Arkansaw's expense, then, after a few words more, Kit mounted his pony and set off upon his dangerous journey. He took a circuitous route to the left in order to come in ahead of the red-skins; while Silver Star and the others followed along upon the trail.

It was about two hours before they again came in sight of the red-skins, and when they did, found them stopped upon a hillside gathered around Kit Bandy, who sat upon his horse swinging his arms and gesticulating in an excited manner. Now and then a yell sounded across the plain, and for several minutes it was a question of doubt whether the fearless old man had been accepted as a friend or foe.

Even Kit himself was in doubt whether he was going to lose his scalp, or be permitted to depart in peace. Some of the Blackfeet seemed favorably disposed toward him, but the majority were fierce and vindictive.

Kit noticed that there was one white man among them, though he was so disguised, and spoke so low to the savages, that he could see nothing familiar about him.

The discussion as to the disposition of the white man—old Kit—was finally settled by two savages passing a rope around his legs and tying it under the animal's belly. He was to be taken along, a prisoner, and when the party resumed its march, a red-skin led his pony, and two others with lances walked close behind.

Upon entering the band Kit met with a bitter disappointment, for he found that Hellice and Elwe were not there; and now as he rode along, a captive, he had ample time to reflect over his own predicament and the probable fate of the girls. He wondered if the latter could have fallen into the hands of Sioux instead of Blackfeet—if not, whether they had been killed, and those words written upon the rock by some one else. He looked at every girl, but saw no scalps.

And they moved on—the savages silent, Kit thoughtful. More than an hour had passed. The wind was still blowing, and a thousand little whirlwinds—marked by columns of black dust—were twisting upward into the sky in every direction as they moved rapidly across the plain; and now and then all would dissolve into a strong wind and roll as a perfect billow of ashes down before it as blinding as the dread simoom of Sahara desert.

The savages were in a little valley when one of these terrible gusts came sweeping down the plain, rolling a boiling, seething cloud before it; and in the very midst of this cloud a snow-white horse appeared—galloping with the wind.

A cry burst from every savage's lips, and, as every eye became fixed upon the phantom horse that was apparently, floating upon the breath of the storm, strange fear took possession of each breast.

"Oh, horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Old Kit, "that's a spirit of the whirlwind—the boss of old Jupiter!"

The savages made no reply, for they did not understand a word he said.

All eyes remained fixed upon the horse moving along with the cloud; but, suddenly, it disappeared as if by magic. The cloud moved on, leaving the bare ridge before them plainly outlined against the sullen-browed north.

The savages exchanged glances. Superstition was written upon every face, and even while they stood discussing the subject in excited tones—the horse again appeared—rose up out of the crest of the hill before them, and turning its head, looked down upon them. A moment later a little cloud of smoke burst from under the animal's neck; and while the clear, startling report of a rifle came ringing down the plain like the voice of doom, a savage uttered a cry of agony and reeling in his saddle dropped his head upon his breast and fell dead at the feet of his pony.

"A thunderbolt of the avenging spirit of the whirlwind!" cried Old Kit, with uplifted hands, while he threw all the terror into his looks that human emotion could express. He spoke the Blackfoot tongue, and his words and looks did not fail to have their desired effect. The disguised white man growled a fearful oath in his beard.

For a moment the savages stood spellbound, terror-stricken; but a word from the renegade roused them. A footman leaped into the vacant saddle of his fallen friend, and then, with a yell, the four charged up the hill whence the death-blow had come. But when they gained the crest of the ridge the spot where the white horse had appeared—it was not to be seen. They galloped up and down the ridge, but nowhere could they see it. Meanwhile, those on foot moved on and joined the horsemen on the hill. A short halt was again made and the white horse discussed.

Old Kit sat a silent listener to the theories advanced regarding it, a broad, grim smile upon his face.

Finally the savages moved on. They had just reached the next valley when, lo! before them, out of the crest of the hills, rose that same white horse. A cry of excitement burst from the lips of the redskins, and then a dozen rifles were raised and fired at the phantom horse. But the animal never moved, for it was fully three hundred yards away, and the savage bullets fell short of the mark.

Then again the mounted savages charged upon the hill, but, before they had gone a dozen rods, the foremost one fell from his horse dead, and the pony dashed away over the plain in affright.

In a black whirlwind sweeping over from the west the white horse disappeared.

The remaining mounted savages scoured the plain for a mile or more around, and returned with the same old story—vanished!

But, even while they were telling their story, up leaps the terrible white horse out of the hill to their left!

The savages shrink back with a cry of alarm, raise their guns and fire, dead against the wind, at the horse; but, as the report of their rifles is swept back over their heads, a puff of smoke is seen under the white horse's neck, and another mounted savage tumbles from his pony, mortally wounded.

The empty saddle is soon filled, and for the third time pursuit is given to the white horse; but, even before they return—while they are searching in one direction—the dread slayer appears from the clouds of ashes in another direction, and repeats his deadly work.

"Oh, horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Old Kit, in the Blackfoot tongue; "I tell you, red-skins, we'll all be murdered! That is the spirit of the whirlwind, I tell ye, and I expect he's got his back up—is mad 'bout your keepin' me haltered up here. You'd better let me go, I expect."

"We will deceive the avenger," said the leader of the red-skins; and then Kit was taken from his horse and tricked out in the suit of one of the dead warriors, wrapped in a blanket, then placed upon a different pony. All the rest of the savages dismounted, leaving Kit alone upon horseback—a conspicuous object for the eye of the avenger.

"Now we will see if the slayer is of the Great Spirit," said the chief, as the party moved on.

Old Kit really felt uneasy, for, dressed as he was, he knew it would be no easy matter to distinguish him from a savage, any distance. So it was with great anxiety and uneasiness that both he and the savages watched for the appearance of the white horse again; and when it finally rose in view on the right it was not discovered until a bullet had pierced the brain of the savage walking just in front of Kit's pony.

This filled the hearts of the savages with dismay, and, turning to the prisoner, one of them said:

"The pale-face is an evil spirit; bullets will not harm him."

"Well, I've no fault to find with the bullets, red-skins, but I have with your treatment; and if you don't let me go, every mother's brat of you'll be deader than Ole Tamanund in less than two hours. That avenger is my guardian angel. His boss is swift as the wind, and his rifle—well, it will speak for itself."

"Then let the scalp of the pale-face atone the death of our braves that his friend has slain."

"All right, red-skins, go in on your muscle; but remember you provoke the white horse to follow you till the last of you are dead. There's no squakin' 'bout this; but if you'll free me, the white horse shall not slay another of your braves. I have spoken."

"Let the pale-face prove his words, and go free."

"Thar, now, red-skins, that sounds delicious,"

replied Kit, keeping a sharp look-out for the white horse.

It was not more than ten minutes before the animal appeared on the hill about three hundred yards to the east of the party.

"Hold, Silver Star, hold! Peace, boy, peace!" shouted the old man at the top of his iron lungs, and the wind bore his words to the ears of the avenger.

Then, for the first time, the form of a rider appeared upon the back of the white horse.

An exclamation burst from the lips of the savage.

"There, now, you see, don't you, red-skins?" asked Kit, laying it off with hands; "you see don't you, what's been doin' the devilment with your ducks? Do you see that rider on that horse? Do you see that star on his breast? Gods of Olympus, Ingins! that's Silver Star—a jewel, plucked from the constellation of Jupiter, and he can deal out thunderbolts and chained-lightnin' to you fellers till the cows come home. That boss he rides is winged Pegasus, and when he runs he jist makes things smoke. Oh, it's awful, red-skins; so give me liberty or give me death—liberty, if ye please."

"The hands of the Blackfeet are not lifted against the pale-face," said the chief in a conciliatory tone.

"That's it—I knowed all along you were jist tryin' to bother me—just like a jolly Blackfoot. I'll bet you fellers are the stuff for breeches. Never stole a girl in your lives, nor pared a human head. I can see the light shinin' through your eyes that shows a Christian soul. Peace on earth and good will to all men is written on the tablets of your great, bouncin' big hearts. Purgatory isn't near full of sich brave warriors as you be, by a long shot. So now, Ingins, let us part good friends, lovers—sweethearts. Give my love to your family and folks; tell them I'd like to see them in—ahem!"

With all this flattery and sarcasm, the meaning and intent of which the red-skins accepted in good faith, Old Kit turned his pony's head and rode away, though he never felt such fear in all his life of being shot in the back. He dare not look back for fear such an act would betray a mistrust and provoke a shot. He rode slowly on, biting his lip and fairly "scringing;" but, finally, he passed beyond the range of the enemy's guns, then he put spur and galloped on up to Silver Star, his face contorted and his whole frame fairly shaking with laughter.

"By the horn of Joshua!" he exclaimed, "that war a leetle the best performance I ever seen, Silver Star, since ole Sabina undertook to whoop her own shadow, thinkin' it war another woman foolin' 'round me."

"I put in some good shots, considering the wind, didn't I Kit?" demanded the young Knight of the Prairie.

"Plumb-center; knocked a red-skin Jordanward every time; and dogged if I didn't begin to feel on-easy 'bout my own carcass when they trigged me out a la Blackfoot, and left me alone on a hoss."

"Bah, Kit! I could tell them long legs of yours far as I could see you; them legs are what saved you. But the girls are not there, are they?"

"No, and the Lord only knows where they are, boy."

"They must be dead, Kit," with a tone of bitter disappointment.

"Wal, I can't tell ye whether they are or not. It's the queerest case I ever come across in my life; but we're not goin' to give it up yet—not if the court knows herself. Them Ingins we follered right from the place where I left the gals, and it's my solemn opinion they let the girls out of their retreat, be they dead or alive. But, let's git around to the boys; I see them peekin' up over the hill yander as if eager to have a finger in the pie. Ah! see them noble Loes marchin' away northward! I'll swear I never saw one white hoss and a chunk of a boy knock the satanic tigerosity outen thirty Indians as slick as you did outen them fellers. But if they'd all been mounted you'd not had it so easy. Oh, it was a glorious victory, splendid sight. I enjoyed it. Why, boy, you could pick off every one of the critters afore they get near across the plain."

"I know it; but I don't want to, Kit; I have no desire to shed human blood unnecessarily. What I desire most, now, is to know where them girls are."

They rode on and soon joined Arkansaw and Sparrowhawk. The latter was bowed down with grief and disappointment when he learned that the maidens were not with the Indians.

Without delay the party rode back to the river and there went into camp; but early the next morning they were on the move up the stream.

As they rode away through the early dawn, Arkansaw said:

"Now, boys, where will we strike next?"

"Straight for the camp of those Government Surveyors," Old Kit answered, with decision.

"Do you really think it'll pay us, Kitsie?"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit; I don't believe them boys are the clear quill—in fact, I almost know it; so do you. They are all nicely trigged out for surveyin', but, by the horn of Joshua! I can't melt into the confidence of that pair, Herman Braash and Professor Daymon."

"Why, you don't mistrust them, do you, Mr. Bandy?"

"I don't, eh? Mebbe you know more 'bout it than I do, Arky," replied Kit; "now you know—or ought to—that this country's been infested with a gang of outlaws under Paul Osman, don't you?"

At mention of the name of this robber-chief, Sparrowhawk started and fixed a quick, strange look upon Silver Star who rode at his side. But, instantly recovering himself, he glanced ahead, spoke to his pony and began humming a low, plaintive air to himself.

But the keen eye of the Boy Knight did not fail to catch the look of his companion, and the strange expression that overspread his handsome face. There was a meaning in it, deep and mysterious. He saw that the name of the outlaw affected him visibly, and as he rode along, he pondered the matter over in his mind. It had been strengthened by past experience with the strange recluse of Spirit Swamp. Could such a thing be possible, the young knight dared to think, that he—Sparrowhawk—was Osman, the Outlaw himself? God forbid!

"Yes," said Old Arkansaw, in reply to Bandy, "I've heard of this man, Osman, the Outlaw, and I've thought it thunderin' queer that you men can't find his den."

"Well, yes, it seems so; but, hasn't Silver Star and others been huntin' and watchin' for him this year and more?" questioned Bandy; and again Sparrowhawk turned and gave Silver Star a look that continued to weave that web of mystery around the young man's life.

"And what good's it done?" asked Arkansaw; "why don't the military come out and rummage the country and find the freebooter, and hang him and be done with it?"

"I think, Arkansaw, we'll have the honor of breakin' that outlaw's nest up. I think if we had fun yis-terday, on the prairie, we'll have haydoogins of it in a day or two. In fact, when we reach that surveyors' camp, if we don't stir up a hornets' nest, I've not see'd one stirred since old Sabina Bandy locked me up in the bedroom and poured a swarm of bees down the stovepipe hole upon me."

An outburst of laughter followed.

The party rode on and finally came in sight of the little grove on the hill wherein the surveyors were encamped. Not a sign of life was visible about it; but, not sure that it was deserted, Kit halted the party in the timber at the foot of the hill, and rode forward alone to make a reconnaissance. He soon reached the little grove crowning the hill, and disappeared in it; but a moment later he came out again, and waving his cap in the air motioned the others to advance.

The three rode up the hill and entered the *motte*, wherein they found Kit Bandy and his wife Sabina seated side by side upon a fallen log, engaged in a low conversation.

But, the surveyors were gone, and again the hopes of Silver Star and Sparrowhawk sunk in their breasts.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KIT TAKES THE COMPASS.

OUR friends took dinner in the grove, then mounting they set off upon the trail of the surveying party.

Old Kit, having the advantage of a horse, felt rejoiced at leaving his wife behind; but, hardly had he spoken his mock farewell, ere Sabina led a sorrow-looking old mule from a thicket hard by, and mounting it came on and joined the party, a smile of triumph beaming upon her face.

"Please gracious, Kit Columbus Bandy, you've dodged me for the last time," the old woman exclaimed, pounding her mule with her umbrella.

"Oh, horn of Joshua!" groaned Kit, looking the sadness he could not express.

A compromise was effected between the husband and wife, for the time being, and all rode along harmoniously.

The trail of the surveyors was plain, the wheels of their wagon making a deep impression in the soil. They forded the White Earth and passing from among the wooded hills and bluffs entered the open prairie. Here the trail was more difficult to follow. The autumnal fires had not visited this part of the country, and a coat of thick dry grass covered the plain.

The keen eye of Silver Star, accustomed to the trail, was called into play, and so the party moved on, and about the middle of the afternoon the surveyors were discovered, heading northward, about a mile away.

Silver Star and Old Kit deployed themselves to the right to observe the movements of the party. They rode around—keeping in the low grounds—until they had gained a point where they could command a fair view of the whole corps of surveyors. The wagon was being drawn by four good mules, and followed by an escort of some ten mounted men. In advance was a man carrying a long pole with a red flag, and several shorter ones with white flags. Far behind were two men, and between these and the wagon were two more—all mounted but the last two.

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed Kit, after he had taken a look at the party through Silver Star's glass, "do you see the movements, my boy? Do you see Uncle Sam's devoted servants?"

"Yes, I can see them with the naked eye; but they are surveyors, Kit. We are on the wrong trail."

"Well, what makes you think so, Silver Star?"

"That's easy enough determined. That man in front is the flag-man; those two behind the wagon are the chain-bearers—you can see them at work—and those two away behind are the engineer or surveyor and his assistant. With the glass you can see his compass and staff easy enough."

"That's all so, boy, and you can see their guns and pistols, too. I tell you that's a clever trick to fool the unsophisticated; but it won't pan with me worth a cent. I've seen men go into the pulpit in ministerial robes, and yet be the hired servant of the devil. Now, Silver, I, Kit Bandy, know that there are no surveyors in this country or else they'd be escorted by the military. Old Arky and me made them fellers' camp a visit t'other day, and we see'd all wasn't right then. No, that surveyin' business is all a blind, and I'll bet ten to one that the gals are in that wagon."

"Then you must have positive proof of the fact," said the Boy Knight.

"I have, Silver; the girls are in that wagon!"

"Then, by gracious, Kit, I—"

"Now, hold on, Silver Star—set down and keep cool—don't let a brace of pretty gals make a plumb fool of you. I don't blame you for lovin' them, for if I could shake Sabina and smooth out these wrinkles and crow's-tracks on my ole face, I'd try to cut you out, boy."

"Well, if they have the girls then they are bad men, and I've a notion to begin wingin' them as I did the Indians yesterday. What do you say?"

"No, no, boy; you can't ever come that game with them freebooters, for that's what they are. You can see they are all well mounted, and the Indians weren't. Besides, robbers always have fast horses, and there may be some in that gang that would discount your gray. And there may be good marksmen there, too, with long-ranged rifles. Then again you haven't got black whirlwinds to ride in—no ridges, scarcely, to dodge behind. No, it will never do, boy; we've got to circumvent them dogs some way or other before they cross the Cheyenne and git into the hills."

"They're just about goin' to strike the Buffalo Pass crossin'," said Silver Star; "we might get in ahead of them and ambush them."

"We must keep them out of the Buffalo Pass, boy—to the right, and that'll give us a better chance. Oh, horn of Joshua! if I had about fifty of my braves here now I'd rake them ole outlaws from taw."

"Your braves? what do you mean by that, Kit?"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Kit; "why, boy, I am White Crane, the mysterious chief!"

"You're a-jokin', Kit!" exclaimed the boy.

"I am, am I? Didn't I save your bacon the night I met you at the Dead Fall? Didn't I shoot two of my braves next mornin' to git you out of your deeficulty?"

"Great miracles! a light bursts upon my mind. I see through that mystery. Why, man, how dare you serve two masters? You're a puzzle, Kit. You're a cheat—a fraud!"

"Well, I'll tell you all about it some day. It tickled Arkansaw almost to death when I told him; but the first thing to be did is to rescue them gals. Now, I suggest that we creep down to the train and capture that surveyor and his man, and then you and me run the helm awhile—long enough to git them out of range of the Buffalo Pass."

"Good, Kit! good, White Crane! anything to be at work!"

The two descended the bluff they were on and rode back to their friends; and then they all galloped around almost to the head of the train, all the while keeping in the low valleys.

Leaving their horses and friends concealed behind a hill, Kit and Silver Star crept along through the tall grass of a long narrow slough until they came to where the wagon had crossed. Knowing that the surveyor and his men had not crossed, they concealed themselves in the grass to await their approach.

In a few minutes Herman Braash and a servant appeared over the hill and rode down toward them. They carried a compass and field-glass and staff. As they descended the hill they slacked their animals' pace to a slow walk. They were talking, all unconscious of the eyes that were upon them—the ears that heard Braash say:

"If we get to the river without molestation, we'll be all safe enough. Those horsemen we seen may be pursuers; but I hardly think they are Bandy and his tribe, for they, of course, will follow the Indians, and not find out their mistake till we get into the hills, and then—"

"Oh! but you're not there!" exclaimed a voice, and Kit Bandy and Silver Star sprung out of the grass, seized their horses and held a cocked revolver at each breast; "s death, men, to move!"

Herman Braash was thunderstruck, and his face grew white as a sheet. But he soon recovered his presence of mind, and with a forced laugh, said:

"Why, Bandy, my old friend, what does this mean?"

"Business!" replied Bandy, "and you can't bluff me a bit with laughin', Herman. I'm ole pizen, and that boy's still wuss. All we want is for you to dismount and give up."

Braash's companion was a Mexican half-breed with the look of a desperado. His horse had been seized by Silver Star, who, boy that he was, looked so insignificant to the ruffian, standing as he was in the grass, that, as soon as the order to dismount was given, he—the robber—made a grab for his revolver and succeeded in drawing it, but before he could fire, Silver Star sent a bullet through his brain. Not a groan even escaped his lips, and as he tumbled a lifeless heap to the earth, Braash grew pale and the glare of a demon shot from his eyes; but he dismounted and gave himself up, saying:

"Bandy, what does this murderous assault mean? You'll have to answer to the United States government for this."

"I know it," replied Kit, taking a pair of handcuffs from his pockets, "and I've been wantin' the chance these two years. These wristlets, Herman, I've carried for you till they act'ly wore a hole in my pocket; so now take them on like a little man—there, snap, she goes!"

Completely vanquished, Braash made no resistance, and the manacles were placed upon his wrists. "Now, sir," remarked Kit, "you've some gals in your wagon that we want next."

"Indeed!" sneered the villain; "then get them. Waylay the wagon, won't you, you accursed old baboon?"

"Can't you give me a written order for them?"

"When I do you'll know it. You have taken the

advantage of me once, but you cannot do it again."

Alarmed by the pistol-shot—the wind being toward them—Old Arkansaw and his friends hastened to the scene of action. Meanwhile, Silver Star had crept to the top of the hill to see if the shot had alarmed the outlaws; but as the wind was unfavorable, it appeared the sound did not reach them.

Kit was not long in preparing for the next move. He had Silver Star don the Mexican's coat and hat, while he effected a change of suits with the surveyor. This done, the two mounted the outlaws' horses, and, taking the compass and other surveying tools, rode boldly forward upon the trail of the wagon, leaving Braash in charge of Old Arkansaw and Sparrowhawk.

When Kit and his companion reached the top of the hill, the wagon and escort were half a mile ahead, as were the chain-bearers also; while, beyond all, the flagman was standing with his pole set. About two hundred yards in advance of our friends stood a short pole, to which was attached a red strip of cloth. Silver Star was the first to discover it, and at once inquired what it meant.

"I see you know nothin' much 'bout surveyin', boy," replied Kit; "I used to do a little of it—was axman for a party once, and know all 'bout it. That flag yonder is a 'marker,' as I call them. It marks the spot where the flagman's pole last sot, when the surveyor sighted his line through. He marked the spot with that flag, and went on, so's to be at the next point by the time we reached here. Now, I'll set there and make another sight through, then move on. Oh, you'll learn, boy; but arn't the warmints takin' a sight of pains, though, to make folks believe they're angels? You see, anything bearin' a government stamp has a free pass through this country—particularly across Indian reservations, and that's one thing that these scoundrels have come this surveyin' dodge on us for. But, how do I look, Silver, with this rig on? cavalierish? superbustic?"

"Oh, you look skrimtuous—like General Custer." "You, boy, with that coat and hat—both too big—look like the orneryest greaser that ever stabbed a man in the back; but here we are."

Reaching the "marker," Kit dismounted, placed the staff by the flag and then adjusted the compass and liberated the needle. The flagman was in plain view, though nearly a mile away.

Kit took the field-glass and scanned the whole party before him carefully. The glass brought them so close that he almost shuddered. He could see the very eyes of the flagman, a villainous-looking fellow, apparently looking right into his own face.

"I tell you, boy, they're armed like pirates and all good men—on good horses; but, that makes no difference. We must put them off the Buffalo Pass route, and throw them east. I see Herman, the bugger, war only runnin' on about one or two degrees bearin', but I'll pop her around to about ten degrees this time, and a little more next, and that'll about take us to the Open Wood Ford. Dast the needle, it dips and bobs round too much to suit me—too much attractions. It reminds me of old Sabina when thar's other ladies around me; but thar, that's good enough."

The needle having settled, Old Kit glanced through the sights, then took off his hat in his right hand and held it out from him. The flagman understood the signal, and at once removed his pole several rods to the right, and was kept moving until Kit was afraid to go further for fear too much of a deviation at one time might arouse suspicion. It is true, the sun could not be seen, and so no one could tell, exactly, the points of the compass, except those with the compass; still Kit was afraid the outlaws might know the country better than he did.

When the flagman was given the signal to "stick"—by the surveyor raising both hands and then dropping them—he marked the spot with a little flag and went on; while Kit, mounting his horse, rode on, laughing till his sides ached.

"Yesterday was your day, Silver Star," he said, "and to-day's mine. You were a wind-spirit, and I am a civil engineer. Ho! ho! ho—orn of Joshua! won't there be a b'ilin' at camp when them fools ahead find out that we're running this helm-business? Zounds! if they'd a glass they might see that your clothes hang loosish on you, and that my legs are poked through this coat furdier than Herman's were. Oh, but this is a scientific party—ha! ha! ha! But I wonder whar Professor Daymon is with his maps and lofty intellect?"

The two rode on until they came to the next "marker," when Kit again set the compass and sighted through. As before, he gave their course a few degrees east bearing; and in this way they went on for some ten miles without detection. The last "set" made by the flagman brought him to the edge of the timber bordering the Big Cheyenne river.

It was now almost dark, and as old Kit knew the party would encamp at the river when they found they were out of their course, the old man was at a loss as to what he should do. They dare not go on, of course, and the absence of Herman and the Mexican might soon reveal the state of affairs. But, after all, he had accomplished all he aimed at—had thrown the outlaws more than five miles out of their course.

"Well, Silver," the old man said, "we might as well ride back and meet the rest of the folks and hold a council of war—the war itself, if Sabina's there yet. All the skullduggery part is through with now, and next comes the danger part."

They turned about and rode back along the trail, and had gone but a short distance when they discovered Old Arkansaw and Sparrowhawk riding toward them at the top of their animals' speed.

"What in the furies are up now?" exclaimed Kit,

"They surely haven't left that outlaw with that wife of yours," remarked Silver Star.

In a moment the riders drew up before them.

"Good God, Bandy!" exclaimed Arkansaw, "that man Braash got away from us!"

"Horn of Joshua! how come that? Were you asleep, Arky?"

"No; that infernalated old woman of yourn did it through confounded spite. You see, we mounted the prisoner on Silver Star's horse, and then hitched the horse to Sabina's mule, and when our backs were turned, she cut the hitch-rein, and before we could say Jack Robinson, the rascal put them big spurs into Prince's side and shot away like an arrow."

"Well, great Jehovah! that'll spile all our 'range-ments, sure. Why didn't you strangle that woman? Where is she?"

"Last we see'd of her she was follerin' Herman Braash."

"Well, let 'r rip; we'll go through that robber camp afore mornin' just the same or my name's not Ka-ris-topher Ka-lumbus Bandy."

"Second the motion," added Old Arkansaw, eager for the fray.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PIKE THOMAS, DETECTIVE.

ALL unconscious of what was going on behind them, the outlaws moved on until the river was reached. Herman Braash, the captain of the band, and his servant Lavejoe, had remained behind as a rear-guard under the shallow pretense of conducting the survey. It is true they were moving across the open prairie, and the compass enabled them to keep a direct course, so that it was useful as well as a disguise. The flagman was the real scout and guide of the party, though he yielded to the directions of the man at the helm for the reason that he had never attempted to cross the open prairie to the Buffalo Pass. And thus double guarded, they moved rapidly forward, but to their surprise came out at Open Wood Crossing.

When the river was reached, all hands went to work preparing for the night, and while thus engaged, the man on guard announced the approach of a horseman from the east.

"Well," one of the party exclaimed, who can it be? and why in the nation don't the captain and Lavejoe come in?"

No one answered for no one knew; but a moment later the man on the white horse dashed into camp, and the question was answered. Captain Braash had arrived.

A cry of astonishment burst from every lip while one frightful oath after another issued from the captain's lips as his horse kept plunging about.

"Catch this horse, idiots!" he finally screamed.

A man caught the frightened, panting animal.

"Captain, what does this mean?" asked the man.

"It means that we are a set of stupid asses! Kit Bandy and that young hell-hound, Silver Star, waylaid me and Lavejoe, and after killing Lave, forced me to surrender. I was then handcuffed by that infernal Bandy and placed on that horse; but, thanks to the jealousy of old Bandy's wife who came up with Arkansaw and another chap whom I recognized as Paul Osman, I managed to escape. She cut the hitch rein when the others' faces were turned and told me to go, and I went. You fools have been guided here by old Kit Bandy and that boy, who took our coats, hats and instruments and followed in our places. I should think you could have seen you were not going to the Buffalo Pass."

"By the immaculate! who'd 'a' dreamed of sich an infernal trick!" exclaimed the flagman; "everything went along as usual—I detected nothin'."

"Ah! them fellows are cunning devils. All our attempts to throw them off the track of the girls have been mere boy's play. We'll have to fight our way through now, and we'll do thunderin' well if we get the train through at all. But they'll never get them girls alive, now mind! Here, some of you fellows, get these handcuffs off my wrist. Curse that Bandy! This tells me that he's a sneakin' old Government hireling."

After the irons were removed from the captain's wrists, he personally superintended the arrangement of the camp; and while thus engaged the approach of another horseman through the gathering twilight was announced.

A few minutes later, Sabina Bandy came "pegging" into camp upon her old mule.

The outlaws jeered and booed as she came up, but the captain quickly put an end to this by informing them that she was the woman who had liberated him.

"Why have you come here, Mrs. Bandy?" the outlaw asked, advancing to where she had drawn rein and dismounted.

"Because I wanted to tell you that old Kit Bandy, my lawfully-wedded husband, is in love with one of them gals in your wagon. That's exactly why I come."

"How do you know there's girls in that wagon?"

"Why, I heard ole Kit say so; and as he's got his ole big nose into every thing, I reckoned he knowed; and as I was sayin', he's in love with one of them girls and will raise the ole fury till he gits her into his clutches; but please gracious, I, his broken-hearted wife, have determined he'll never take another woman to share his bed and board as long as my head's cold, and my tongue can wag. I follered you a-purpose to tell you to be on your guard or he'll go through your camp this blessed night. Double and thruple your guards round them gals. He beat me once; now I'm goin' to spend the rest of my life tryin' to beat him."

"I am under great and lasting obligations to you, Mrs. Bandy," said the outlaw captain, "for givin' "

me this timely warning. I fully sympathize with you in your worse than widowhood, and will endeavor to give you a decree of divorce the first opportunity by putting a bullet through that old Bandy's brain. Now, Mrs. Bandy, I extend to you the hospitality of our camp, such as it is, for the night. It is going to rain, I fear, and will be a bad, dismal night for a woman to be out."

"I'm a poor, lone woman and have got awful rude and sunburnt riding around after Old Kit Bandy; but the man that does question my good name is a dead man, so I reckon I don't care if I do stop with you as long as thar's other weemin-folks in your company."

"You may share the wagon with our lady friends if you wish," was the generous freebooter's offer.

"I don't know as young, flippety-flappety girls care 'bout 'sociatin' with an old woman, but I'm as good as they dare be, Mr. Brasher, and if they don't like me they can git out with their 'ristocratic manners and pride. If you fellers 'll jist look after Jerusalem, my mule, I'll be obleeged to you."

Considering what she had done for him, and her warning as to Bandy's designs, the outlaw captain could not find it in his heart to mistrust the crazy old woman of any designs upon his confidence; and so he conducted her to the wagon, and raising the cover hanging over the forward end, he said:

"Girls, if you wish a few minutes' exercise, you have the privilege of getting out and walking around. Mrs. Bandy, here, will keep you company."

"Yes, gals; come, hop out and take a little promenade with old Aunt Sabina Bandy," added the old woman.

"Oh, Mrs. Bandy!" exclaimed the captive maidens, starting up as if with joy at the sound of the old woman's voice.

"Ah! I see you recognize Mrs. Bandy—have met before," said the outlaw chief, in surprise.

"Oh, yes," said Sabina, "I've see'd 'em both afore; and ar'n't they pretty darlings, Mr. Brack? No wonder Old Kit Bandy's nighly distracted 'bout them."

The faces of the maidens wore a look of hopeless despondency. Their eyes were red with weeping, and their bodies weak and sore with long confinement. Gladly they accepted the invitation to a walk, and getting out of the wagon, each accepted an arm of Mrs. Bandy and moved slowly away toward the river, an armed guard keeping a strict watch upon them.

In the course of an hour the three were taken back to the wagon and placed therein. Mrs. Bandy's tongue ran incessantly, Old Kit being the chief object of discussion.

As the robber chief had predicted, the deep-blue haze of Indian summer thickened into lowering clouds, and about dark a slow, drizzling rain set in. This made the outlaws all the more uneasy, for it would be an advantage to Old Kit Bandy's operations, while it would be a disadvantage to them. To thwart Kit's plans, however, should an attempt to release the girls be made, the outlaw chief conceived an idea which he at once proceeded to carry into execution.

The stream before them was about six rods wide, three feet deep, and rather swift; and into the very center of this the wagon, with the women, was drawn, to be left for the night.

When old Sabina saw what was intended, she thrust her head out under the canvas cover and shouted:

"That's it, Mr. Brasket; I'll bet my Jerusalem mule Old Kit 'll not find us here this night."

The water came within two or three inches of the wagon-box, and rushed and roared under and around it, and through the spokes of the wheels, with a noise that made Hellice and Elwe dizzy.

"Oh, dear!" cried the pretty Hellice, "what if the rain should raise the river and flood the wagon?"

"Then we'd be drowned—out of our troubles, Hellice," was little Elwe's consoling reply.

"Oh, we mustn't talk about dying any more, Elwe, for you know Aunt Sabina told us Silver Star and Sparrowhawk are alive and near us."

"Please gracious!" exclaimed the old woman, "there is a little heart in love."

Hellice blushed crimson—corroboration strong!

"Men are deceitful critters," Sabina went on.

"I've had enough of them, children, in a matrimonial way. Man's love is all moonshine."

"Perhaps all men are not like your husband, Mrs. Bandy."

"Please gracious, I should hope not."

Soon after dark Herman Braash rode over to the wagon bringing the captives' supper on a large tin pan and some coffee in a stone jug. He spoke a few words and then returned to the shore.

The women ate, with a keen relish, the dry biscuit, roasted venison and fish and drank some of the coffee. The food gave them strength, both in body and mind.

Finally Sabina narrated the adventures of Silver Star and Bandy on the burnt prairie the day before, and also their adventures of that day, concluding with her own part in the play in liberating Herman Braash.

"Oh, aunty! why did you liberate him?" asked Hellice.

"Why, children," she said, laying her arms about their necks and drawing them closer to her, "I done it jist because I wanted to rescue you—sh! now, don't scream nor git the fidgets."

"Oh, you are so kind, Mrs. Bandy! You were instrumental in rescuing us the other night," replied Hellice, in a whisper.

"Yes, and I was awfully afraid that that white man, called Sky Traveler by the Indians, would be here to-night and spoil all our fun; but, please gracious, he is not. Their runnin' this wagon out here is a sharp trick; but, gals, if you'll jist be

brave we'll get out of this. I had a plan for dry land figured out; but now I've changed it into a water-plan, and I know it will work; but it'll take strong nerves, silent tongues and steady hands."

"Oh, Mrs. Bandy! I am afraid there is no possible chance for us. Three weak, nervous women could do little against this current—surrounded by vigilant outlaws."

"Ah, me!" said the old woman, in a tone that startled the girls, "I see your woman's instinct has failed to penetrate my disguise. You think me what I appear to be—a weak-minded, old, rattle-brained woman; but, such is not the case. Now don't scream, nor fly to pieces, girls, for I'm going to tell you something; I am no more a woman than old Kit Bandy is; I am a man—I am Pike Thomas, the—"

"The detective?" exclaimed Hellice.

"The detective," said the eccentric genius.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DETECTIVE'S PLAN.

It was several minutes before the girls could become reconciled to the fact that Sabina Bandy was, in reality, a man; and it required every effort of the little old detective to keep them from expressing their surprise in excited tones. He would not have told them who he was had it not been to inspire confidence in the dangerous plan he was about to suggest for their release.

To Hellice the name of Pike Thomas was not unknown. By reputation she knew him well, and his presence there under the circumstances gave her renewed fears instead of hope and confidence.

Not a moment was to be lost, and the detective enforced this upon the maidens' minds.

The darkness in the wagon and out was intense. The patter of the raindrops upon the wagon-cover, and the wash and surge of the water under and around their prison were the only sounds that disturbed the night. It was a dismal, gloomy one.

Pike Thomas listened intently upon all sides to ascertain whether or not there was any one about the wagon besides those inside; and when assured there was not, he turned to the girls and said:

"Now, girls, listen; there is a lot of lariats and ropes in the rear end of this wagon, as you doubtless noticed, and they're what suggested a way of escape for us. You'll admit, now, that if we had a canoe, it would be an easy matter to sail out of here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, certainly; but we have no canoe," replied Elwe.

"But, my dear girls, we have a canoe!"

"You are jesting, aunt—I mean Mr. Thomas."

"I'm not; this umbrella of mine is one of the cuttest contrivances you ever saw, and is a combined tent, umbrella and canoe. It will keep your feet and head both dry. It's made of rubber and covered with cloth on the outside. Clear round the edge is a thin rubber sack, which can be inflated with air by blowing in it, and is then a perfect life-preserver. One person of less than one hundred and fifty pounds weight could not sink it, and so there'll be no danger in one of us going at a time. It's made strong, girls, I assure you—with ribs of whalebone and steel, and was made in New York a purpose for me. Now in this must we escape."

"It will be dangerous, I am afraid," said Elwe, "even though it's possible. I'm so afraid I hav'n't the courage."

"Well, if you want to live a life wusser'n death, go on with these outlaws. They're murderin', thievin' outlaws—fugitives from justice—the followers of Paul Osman. I offer you a chance of escape, girls; will you accept it?"

"We will—we will do the best we can. We have only the once to die, anyhow," Elwe decided.

The little old detective at once went to work with the ropes and lariats. He had to work in the dark, but he seemed possessed of the eyes of a cat, for all went along harmoniously. He tied all the ropes together he could find, and then measured their combined length, woman-fashion—from the tip of the nose to the end of the outstretched hand making a yard. The length proved to be a little less than two hundred yards—not as long as desired, but as much as could be managed easily and quietly.

The next thing to be done was to open the canoe, inflate the life-preserver and then launch the craft. All this occupied but a short time, Thomas having cut the wagon-cover in two and turned it back to give him room to operate.

The drizzling rain sifted down into the hot, flushed faces of the maidens, cooling their brows.

Thomas attached one end of the rope to the handle of the umbrella or now more properly, the mast of the boat, and then placed it in the water. The other end of the rope was made fast to a wagon-bow.

"Now we're ready," he said, "and I'll go first so as to be at the end of the rope to assist you when you come. Of course we'll all land on the same spot, and this tin pan 'll do for a paddle to swing ashore with after the rope is all spun out. I'll send it back in the boat. When I land, it will be on the north shore; now mind, or we might git separated. Don't speak above a whisper, and work as them little hands and hearts never worked before. Don't take time to get scared; jist think that to fail will be death, or what is a thousand times worse. Now mind, my little ladies; pray silently for God's help, and I know He will hear you. The sullen roar of the drizzling rain will be in our favor. Got sent the rain. Put a blanket around you, children, before you start, for we may have a long, wet night of it. Arrange between yourselves who follows next. Now, good-by, gals, and may God speed you."

The little old detective stepped from the wagon into his canoe, and the next moment was drifting

away down the stream at the will of the current. The carefully-coiled rope paying out rapidly through the hands of the maidens told the strength and swiftness of the current.

Ere the latter were aware of the fact, the rope was all out and drawn taut. The strain upon the wagon-bow was great, and for a moment the girls were afraid it would yield under the weight tugging at it.

"It must be caused by the current beating against the canoe," said Hellice, "or else the old man is pulling toward the shore, making an extra strain upon the rope."

Whatever it was, however, pulling at the rope, suddenly let go, and the rope hung free and loose. The maidens now began drawing it in hand over hand. It was fully five minutes before the end of the wet, slippery rope was reached, but it came up with the frail canoe in tow.

"Now, Elwe," said Hellice, "you go next and I will follow."

Elwe drew a heavy blanket hood-like over head and shoulders, kissed Hellice and then stepped out into the canoe, and dropping upon her knees, clasped the post in the center with trembling hands. Then Hellice permitted the rope to slack, and the tiny barque glided away upon the bosom of the rain-dimpled river through an Egyptian gloom.

Left alone, Hellice felt that every minute was an hour. The current of the river seemed to grow more sluggish and the rope to pay out more slowly. Her excited fancy conjured up strange sounds. She could hear the robbers on the shore singing ribald songs and laughing. Their voices sounded demoniacal. She drew a blanket over her head to shut out the sounds and keep the rain off.

A rifle-shot on the south shore suddenly rung out, sending a chill to the maiden's heart. Then silence followed.

In her fear and silent horror, Hellice suddenly discovered that the rope was all out, and the wagon-bow creaking under the strain upon it. She knew by this that Elwe was at her journey's end, and when the strain upon the rope slackened, she again commenced drawing it in.

While thus engaged, she felt something jam against the upper side of the wagon, with such force as to almost upset it, and at the same instant a stream of light shot across the river, and the sound of horses plunging into the water followed.

Looking toward the south shore Hellice saw Herman Braash mounted upon Silver Star's white horse, carrying a lantern and followed by five other mounted men, spurring directly toward the wagon.

With a cry of horror the maiden let go the rope, and sunk back cowering with terror. The next moment the light of the outlaw's lantern flashed into the wagon, revealing to his startled gaze the form of but one captive; but bending his eyes slightly they fell upon the round, cylindrical tube of a revolver thrust through a slit in the opposite side of the cover, and just back of the deadly weapon he caught the greenish glow of a pair of burning eyes!

CHAPTER XXVI.

BETTING THE "BURGUNDY."

HERMAN BRAASH and his followers felt keenly the loss of their Mexican friend, and the trick perpetrated upon them by their enemies. But it served to redouble their vigilance, and the idea of leaving the wagon in the center of the stream seemed a capital one to all—that it insured the captives against release by Bandy and his followers.

A strong guard was posted on each side of the river. Shelters of gum blankets were constructed. What whisky was left in the party was brought out, and those off duty proceeded to prepare themselves for the worst.

They drank, sung and danced; they told ribald jests and cursed the authors of their ills. Sabina Bandy received the praise of some, and the vile anathemas of others. To allude to her mule or her big umbrella was to provoke an outburst of laughter.

And thus the hours went by until the sharp shrill voice of a guard was heard challenging somebody. In a moment every man was upon his feet; but a few seconds later, he whom we have known as Professor Daymon came marching into camp at the head of about twenty-five Blackfoot Indians.

"Why, professor, I'll swear I'm surprised to see you here!" exclaimed Herman Braash.

"No doubt of it, captain, but we were afraid you'd not get through with your force, and so we turned and came up here to meet you. We did not expect to find you here, for it was my understanding that you were to cross at Buffalo Pass."

"Well, it was our intention to cross there," said Braash, "but the fact of it is, Kit Bandy and that infernal Boy Knight are the cause of our being here."

"Judas Iscariot! and so are they the cause of our being here also," cried Daymon, and he went on and narrated their adventure on the prairie with Kit and Silver Star.

Then Braash recounted his adventures.

"Well, did I ever!" was Daymon's only rejoinder.

"Oh, it beats anything I ever heard of, professor! The old devil himself is no match for Bandy and that boy. It is the experience of age and the cunning of youth combined, and if they've a chance they'll outwit Satan himself; for I'll swear, I thought we had this case worked up as slick as human foresight and skill could do it. But alas!"

"Where are the hyenas now?" asked Daymon.

"Hangin' round camp like vultures, no doubt," answered the captain; "but let them hang. They'll find that Herman Braash is not sleeping all the time. If they get their eyes on them girls to-night

They'll be extraordinary sharp, for they're anchored in the wagon out in the middle of the river with guards opposite, on each shore."

"That's a splendid idea, captain. Like a balloon in the air, water leaves no trail. Heavens! how I did wish for a balloon or wings yesterday! That's the way to travel if you don't want Silver Star and Kit Bandy to follow you."

"Well, now, professor," remarked Braash, facetiously, "it seems to me Silver Star *did* strike the trail of your balloon the night you dropped the girl and dumped Akron."

"Just so, Cap; but didn't you say you were taken prisoner to-day?" demanded Daymon, evasively.

"I did—yes, and was released by Bandy's wife."

"What? by that old vagabond of a woman?"

"Could not find it in my heart, Daymon, to speak so very disrespectfully of an old woman—especially one who has befriended me."

"Oh, you generous, gallant soul; do you know why she liberated you? have you any idea?"

"Jealousy, I think; she's got it into her head that Kit's in love with one of the girls. But, by the way, professor, Sabina's a guest in our camp to-night."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Professor Daymon, gazing round him.

"Yes, we gave her permission to share the wagon with the girls and—"

"You did?" exclaimed Daymon, springing to his feet as if he had suddenly become aware of sitting on a hornet's nest.

"Why, yes; what of it, professor?"

"You are an ass—a fool, captain! I'll bet there is not a girl in that wagon."

"Bah, man! how could they get away guarded by a strong current and six men?"

"Didn't I tell you, captain, that I blamed that very old, meddlesome woman of liberating the girls the night we were on the island? And didn't I tell you about her old umbrella canoe?"

"Yes, and by gracious, she's got that umbrella with her now!" exclaimed Braash.

"Then I see through the whole thing, captain; she liberated you as a part of their plans. She knew she could win your good graces—knew you were a lady's man by the kink of your hair; and now I'll bet you the price of fifty bottles of old Burgundy that there's not a woman in that wagon."

"I'll take the bet," said Herman, springing to his feet and ordering a lantern lighted and half a dozen horses brought up.

While these arrangements to settle the bet were being made, the report of a rifle rung out through the darkness. Then a man came running up announcing:

"Cap, I believe there's something wrong over 'bout the wagon."

With an oath the captain vaulted upon the back of Silver Star's horse, to which he had become greatly attached, and, accompanied by five others, plunged into the river and rode over to the wagon.

Raising the light above his head, its beams revealed one side of the wagon-cover stripped from the bows. He looked into the box. He had won the Burgundy, but that was all, for only one of the women was there. His eyes caught sight of the rope hanging over the side of the wagon-box, and then they fell upon that pair of green burning eyes and leveled revolver upon the opposite side.

An oath burst from his lips, but it was immediately followed by a groan. The revolver cracked, and reeling in his saddle, the outlaw fell from the animal's back into the river.

Then a wild yell rose from around the wagon and was immediately followed by the "ping! ping!" of revolvers, the groans of robbers and the plunging of horses in the river.

"Hurrah, boys!" shouted a voice which might have been recognized as Old Kit Bandy's; "pepper it to them! give them goss and glory! hurrah for Hail Co-lumby! Yoop! yoop! avaunt! you purgatorians!"

"Hellice? Elwe?" called an excited voice amid the din of conflict; "are you here, girls? It is me, Silver Star—come quick! fly!"

"Oh, Silver Star!" cried Hellice, starting up at the sound of that voice which had echoed so often through the chambers of her young heart within the past two days; "I am alone—Elwe is gone!"

Silver Star had caught his horse as the outlaw fell from the saddle, and in an instant was upon its back. As Hellice advanced toward him, he reached forward, and throwing his arm about her waist, lifted her from the wagon to a seat before him on the horse. Then he turned the animal down-stream, and riding a short distance in that direction, finally turned, and going ashore, escaped into the woods on the north side of the river.

Meanwhile, Old Kit, Arkansaw and Sparrowhawk had routed the robbers and were masters of the situation for the time being; but the Indians and outlaws were now swarming to the scene of conflict, shouting and yelling and firing their guns until it seemed all the legions of perdition had been turned loose. Our three friends knew it was useless to contend with this infuriated host, and supposing Silver Star had escaped with both the girls, they left the raft upon which they had reached the wagon from above, and escaped ashore.

The outlaws and savages reached the wagon and found it deserted. The voice of their leader was silent in the struggle, and in this they realized a terrible defeat. Herman Braash had been slain!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WAGES OF SIN.

BLINDING darkness surrounded Elwe as the current carried her rapidly down upon the bosom of the stream. The sides of the frail canoe bulged in and

out with the pressure of the water, and at times threatened to collapse; but upon bended knee, with her eyes closed and her lips moving in prayer, the young girl remained until she finally discovered that she was no longer moving—that she had reached the end of the rope.

A voice, at this juncture, startled her. It was that of Pike Thomas, detective. He stood in water to his armpits. Elwe recognized him.

"I'll push you ashore, little one," he said; "I found the water quite shallow, and to make assurance doubly sure, I concluded to wade out here and help you."

"Oh, you are so very kind, Mr. Thomas."

"Thanks, Elwe, thanks."

He pushed the canoe ashore and assisted the maiden to land, and then, was about to let go of the boat when the report of a rifle came from up the river. He listened intently. A light pierced the gloom near the ford. He saw it moving out toward the wagon.

A moment later there was a pistol-shot and a groan. It was followed by the sounds of a desperate struggle.

"By Judas!" exclaimed the detective, "Kit and the boys have got around and into a rub with the robber. Poor little Hellice! I'm afraid she'll not fare as well as you, Elwe."

Elwe sobbed with fear and grief as the terrible sounds of battle rung through the dismal night.

The detective took his boat from the water and conducted the girl back in the woods, converted his canoe into an umbrella and placed it over his fair charge to keep off the drizzling rain.

The sounds of the conflict soon died out, and all became quiet; and now over the spirits of the two came the terrible doubt and anxiety as to the result of the struggle.

The little old detective paced to and fro before the maiden, ever and anon stopping to listen. But all was quiet.

"I don't think they'll attempt much to-night, even if they were victorious," remarked Thomas; "but, for fear of danger, we must be moving out of this vicinity—ah! listen! 'sh!"

The sound of something creeping from the river through the shrubbery was plainly heard. It sounded like a huge serpent dragging its length along upon the earth. As the chills began to roll down the detective's back he drew his revolver.

Suddenly the noise ceased, but was followed by a feeble groan and heavy breathing with a rattling in the throat.

"By Judas! it's somebody, and he's hurt, whoever he is," whispered Thomas to Elwe; "do you hear him breathing and rattling in the throat? He's bleeding at the lungs. Ah! Criminy! I wonder if it's friend or foe?"

Elwe made no reply, but clung trembling at Thomas's side.

Finally the detective uttered a low whistle, but there was no response.

It was so pitchy dark he could not see his hand before him. The breathing continued, with now and then a groan that had within it the unmistakable evidence of genuine pain.

"Who be you?—man or red-skin?" asked Thomas, in a low tone.

A groan, a rattling cough and expectoration followed. Then a voice answered:

"Who's there? I am dying—I am Herman Braash."

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," whispered Thomas to Elwe; then he advanced and bent over the form of the prostrate man. It was Herman Braash, wounded and dying.

The outlaw captain, after falling into the river, had presence of mind to keep himself from drowning, and turning upon his back had allowed the current to carry him down the river, when he finally made his way to shore and crawled into the woods to die.

"Captain, you got it at last, did you?" asked Thomas.

"Who are you?" asked the outlaw.

"Pike Thomas, detective, *alias* Sabina Bandy."

The outlaw expressed no surprise, but replied:

"You deceived me."

"The life of a detective is one of deception, Braash; so is that of a robber. I am sorry that you are wounded, Braash. You are wanted, but then—"

"I must soon answer at the bar of God," interrupted the outlaw.

"Yes, yes; that is all very true. Perhaps you'd like to unburden your soul, Braash, of some of your crimes before you die."

"Where is Sparrowhawk?" asked the outlaw.

"I can't tell you—"

"I am here!" exclaimed a voice, and Sparrowhawk, Kit Bandy and Old Arkansaw stepped from a thicket and stood by the side of the dying robber.

"Please gracious!" exclaimed Thomas.

"Horn of Joshua! it's Sabina! Oh—"

"The cat's out, Kit," interrupted the detective; "I had to tell the girls that I was not a woman, but Pike Thomas."

"Fiends and furies, Kit!" exclaimed Arkansaw, "have you been actin' the 'tarnal fool 'bout that woman all this time? If you have say your prayers, man, and be quick."

"Did I understand you to say Sabina Bandy is Pike Thomas?" queried Sparrowhawk.

"Yes, sir, at your service," responded the detective.

Had it been daylight it would have been seen that Sparrowhawk's face turned deadly white.

"You are wanted, Sparrowhawk, by this dying man," continued the detective; "time's precious, Bandy; you and Arky can settle hereafter."

Sparrowhawk advanced and inquired of Braash

what he desired to say. It was plain from his tone that he was greatly agitated.

"You are Paul Osman, ain't you?" asked Braash.

"Who's Paul Osman?" cried the detective; "by the eye of Jupiter, I've a pair of handcuffs for him."

"I am Paul Osman," responded Sparrowhawk, with a strange, deep voice; "and the gyves are not made for my arms while I am living!"

"Great horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Kit, while a little cry burst from Elwe's lips.

"Oh, salvation!" cried Old Arkansaw, "is it possible, boy, that you are that terrible robber, Osman, the Outlaw?"

"He is Paul Osman," spoke up the dying robber-chief, "but I am the Outlaw!"

"Ah! how's that?" demanded Thomas, somewhat surprised.

"Paul Osman," replied Braash, "lived once in Texas. There he was known as the Boy Sheriff, or Deputy Osman, for he held the appointment of deputy-sheriff of C— county. He soon became a terror to the outlaws and robbers, of whose band I was a member. To get rid of our foe we went to work and implicated the Boy Sheriff with us—proved that he, while pretending to be an officer of justice, was in league with the robbers. By hard swearing we got him convicted and he was sentenced to death. By this change he became known as Osman, the Outlaw, instead of the Boy Sheriff. He was placed in jail to await the day of execution; but, before that day came he, with the help of friends, escaped from prison one night, and with his sister fled the country. The name of Osman, the Outlaw, became known from the provinces to Mexico. Everybody knew he had escaped, and every detective west of the Mississippi was looking for him. But, cunning fellow that he was, he had hid himself away in the Spirit Swamp."

Here the outlaw stopped to clear his throat of the accumulations of blood from his lungs. Surprise was written upon the faces of his auditors, but not one moved or spoke through fear of missing a word. Presently Braash continued:

"It became too hot for me in Texas, and so I moved my quarters to the hills of western Dakota. Here have I been the leader of a band of desperate men. Soon after coming here we discovered that Paul Osman, the Outlaw and fugitive, was hiding away here somewhere. The idea struck us as favorable, and we started the news that the Boy Sheriff had turned up in Dakota at the head of a band of robbers. I did it to shield myself, for I, myself, was the leader of the outlaws. Paul Osman is as innocent of wrong here and in Texas as any living man. The Texas affair was a conspiracy against him to get rid of him; for he was a terror to our profession."

"Bless God! glory to the horn of Joshua!" exclaimed Old Kit. "I knew there was a cloud hanging over your life, boy; and yet I alers knew you were a brave, noble soul. Gracious! I heartily congratulate you, boy."

"And here, too, Sparryhawk," added Old Arkansaw.

A sly little figure crept through the dark, and, placing her little hand in Sparrowhawk's said:

"Heaven be thanked, Sparrowhawk. Oh, that Hellice were here to hear this—to know that you are not guilty!"

Sparrowhawk grasped the maiden's hand and lifting it to his lips imprinted a silent kiss upon it.

"I knew the truth would come some day, Elwe," he said. "I can now go forth a man and fear no one. But for my sister I would never have hid away in a dismal swamp as if I were guilty."

"Why did you invade and destroy the home of Sparrowhawk, Braash, if he was innocent of doing you injury?" Detective Thomas asked of the dying robber.

"I was not to blame for that," Braash replied; "that was the work of Professor Daymon and the Blackfeet."

"That just reminds me; who is Daymon?"

"He is a noted gambler and blackleg," confessed Braash, a little bitterly; "I would not be here had I not been serving him. He lives in St. Louis, and was formerly one of my Texas band. He conceived the idea of making a fortune by usurping the rights of another, and since he has been false to me in one matter, and I am to die, I shall make a clean breast of all. Two years ago he and a man named Akron had found out that one Emma Clark—an orphan girl—who was born in Tennessee was heir to considerable property in that State—"

"By Judas!" exclaimed the detective, rubbing his hands in glee, "that is the very case that Bandy and I have been working up for over two years. Light begins to dawn. Go on, Herman—pardon my interruption."

"The heir could not be found. She had been knocked around from place to place after her mother's death until all traces of her had disappeared. But it appears that Daymon had known the history of the whole case—that he had waited and watched its development, and when the heiress was wanted he resolved to furnish her in the person of his own daughter. But, he had first to get rid of the rightful heiress. He did not want to kill her, but put her far out of the reach of detectives, to be held in case she was needed. To me Daymon agreed to deliver the girl for safe-keeping, such as might be expected in a robbers' den. On the night of the twentieth of October he and Akron left St. Louis in a balloon with Emma Clark, *alias* Elwe Bland—"

"Holy horn of Joshua!" cried Kit Bandy, and for a moment the greatest surprise and excitement prevailed. Elwe burst into tears as she stood listening to the story of her strange abduction.

"They kept the girl under the influence of chloroform during the whole long journey through the heavens. Akron was a servant in the employ a

Emma's foster-father, Henry Bland, and was madly in love with her; but, she having rejected his love, he grew revengeful, and formed a conspiracy with Daymon to kidnap her. Of course, Daymon promised Akron that the girl should be his, and at the same time had agreed to deliver her to me. Akron is the one that chloroformed her and carried her to the balloon which was filled with gas in the rear of some tall buildings in St. Louis. Daymon had made many balloon ascensions; he was well-versed in the laws of the upper-air currents, and so he had no difficulty in making his arrangements. The night of the twentieth the air-current was favorable, and having tapped a gas main in the city he inflated his balloon, and left there, unknown to a single soul in the city. But now began his troubles. The air-current was not very strong and they moved slowly. All night and the next day they floated slowly in this direction. Early on the night of the twenty-first it became apparent that the gas was fast escaping and the balloon settling to earth more than a hundred miles from his destination. And then came the cowardly act on Daymon's part. He proposed to Akron to throw the girl overboard to lighten the balloon. But to this Akron would not hear. They quarreled, and Akron threatened to 'blow' on Daymon. They were now over the timber of the White Earth River, not far from the Sioux village. Finally they settled the matter, Daymon agreeing to lower Emma and Akron from the balloon by means of a rope, as the balloon was almost down to the earth. They quarreled as to who should be let down first; but Daymon had his way, and the girl was lowered first. Relieved of this much of its burden the balloon began to ascend very rapidly. Akron wanted Daymon to open the valve and keep the balloon down until he was out. Again they quarreled, as the balloon continued to ascend, and finally came to blows. Daymon was much the largest man, and getting the better of his companion threw him from the balloon—murdered him!

"Oh, horn of Joshua!" groaned Old Kit. "Daymon sailed away," continued Braash, "and the next day put in an appearance at my ranch, having landed within twenty miles of it. When he told me what he had done I was angry, for he had acted cowardly in leaving the girl as he did. Moreover, I gave him assurance that, instead of the girl being devoured by wolves, as he believed she would be, she had been rescued by no other one than Silver Star, the Boy Knight; and I was right. The way I knew the Boy Knight was in the vicinity of the Big Deer Trail that night was this: we knew there was a mysterious personage wandering about through the country known as the Hidden Spy and Mysterious Spy, that was keeping a watch upon me and my band, and also the Indians. Now, in order to get rid of our worst enemy, Silver Star, I wrote a note and signed it Hidden Spy, requesting him to be on the look-out in the vicinity of Big Deer Trail, or where it enters the White Earth woods, as Paul Osman, the Outlaw, would be there up to some mischief. The note was given the boy, and not suspecting anything, he went down to the place designated. I was late in getting there with my Indians and men; but in time to give chase to the Boy Knight. But upon that white horse of his he eluded us. We knew he had the girl, and from that time on began searching for her. The Blackfeet are my friends, and came along to aid us. In the camp of the Sioux we had a spy—a daughter of one of our band. Her name is Nathelah, and she is the wife of one of the—"

"Great God!" cried Sparrowhawk, as his thoughts reverted to his stolen interviews, his love affairs and talk with this fair, treacherous girl-woman.

"From the lips of Sparrowhawk," Braash went on, "whom Nathelah had woven a spell around, we learned that Elwe Bland, or Emma Clark rather, was in his hidden home. From Old Arkansaw, the day he visited our camp with Kit Bandy, we learned enough to lead us to the cabin of Paul Osman, where not only was Emma found, but another fair and lovely girl, the sister of the Boy Sheriff."

"Gol, infernalated old bastion that I war!" indignantly exclaimed Old Arkansaw; "if anybody wants to he can shoot me!"

"I told you that you'd ought to 'a' had a section of your ole tongue cut off. Skinfintic Daymon had muddled your brain with liquor, and gulled you up with his map and icythermal lines till you didn't know yourself. All that g'ography of yours 'll be wasted on the desert air."

"Oh, that thar was a real Sabina, Kit, to handle you!" sighed Arkansaw.

"Never mind sparring now, boys," said Thomas; "let Captain Braash finish his story. Go on, captain!"

Braash made no reply.

"How are you feeling, captain?" repeated the detective.

Still there was no response. Thomas reached down and took the man's hand in his and felt his pulse.

"That's all, boys," he said; "Herman Braash is dead."

Despite the character of the man, this announcement fell like a shock upon the ears of the bystanders. Elwe crept closer to the side of Sparrowhawk, and a silence sealed the lips of the others. All felt the awesome spirit of the presence of Death.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEATH THE AVENGER.

DAYLIGHT found Kit Bandy, Arkansaw, Sparrowhawk, Thomas and Elwe Bland miles from the scene of their night's adventures. It was still raining

The air was cold and damp, and the night's exposure and the pangs of hunger forced the little party to make a halt for breakfast. They were now in the vicinity of the Buffalo Pass crossing of the Big Cheyenne river, where the broken hills and dense wooded valleys afforded good hiding-places, and selecting one in a narrow defile under some shelving rocks, Thomas, the detective, proceeded to strike a fire.

Kit and Arkansaw shouldered their rifles and went off up the valley in search of game, while Sparrowhawk went down in the direction of the river, leaving Thomas to take care of Elwe.

The detective and maiden, drawing their seat up close to the cheery fire, engaged in a conversation.

"This camping around and dodging and hiding will soon be over with, Elwe," said the detective, who had, during the night, changed his female garment into that of his own sex.

"I hope so, Mr. Thomas," Elwe replied.

"The Lord does favor one sometimes. Now we have been hunting for you for over two years, and had got trace of some one supposed to be you who had been taken into Dakota; and so here Kit and I came, and, in disguise as Indians and old women, have we been searching among all the tribes, and hunters, and settlements; and now, at the eleventh hour, along comes a balloon and plumps you right into our hands. Oh, but you will be a grand heiress, Miss Emma Clark, for that is your name. Now, if Silver Star and Hellice can only be found, then we'll be all happy."

"Oh, I pray poor Hellice is safe!" said Elwe.

"She's in good company if she's with that Silver Star. I tell you what, that boy's a host in himself. And then there's Old Kit Bandy. Why, he's the best detective that ever caught a road-agent or a robber. The government just keeps him on the plains all the time. And then there's Old Arkansaw Abe, the scout; he's another good one, and—"

"Oh, Mr. Thomas!" suddenly cried Elwe, "there comes that terrible man!"

Looking down the defile Thomas saw, to his fear and surprise, the villain, Professor Daymon, coming toward them. He was alone, but Thomas knew not how many Blackfeet were close behind, and an exclamation of fear escaped his lips.

The villain had not discovered our friends yet for his eyes were bent upon the ground as if following a trail.

Detective Thomas took up his big umbrella and opened it. Then he removed the ferule or thimble from the end of the handle and turned the umbrella so that it screened him and Elwe from the outlaw's view.

About this time Daymon looked up. He saw the round, black object under the ledge, and a shudder ran through his frame. He had seen that black shield before and heard of it often. It was the shield of the Silent Slayer. He turned to flee, but from the center of the shield—from the handle of the umbrella—there was a flash and a report, and Professor Daymon fell.

Elwe uttered a little cry of fear and terror.

"There, the jig's up with that sleuth-hound," coolly remarked the detective, inserting another cartridge into his ingenious rifle, the handle of his umbrella-cane.

A few minutes later, Sparrowhawk, hearing the report of the gun, came hurrying back up the ravine, and was startled at sight of the dead body lying in the ravine. But a few words explained all, and the mystery of the Silent Slayer was a mystery no longer.

While Thomas was explaining the workings of his combined umbrella, canoe and rifle, who should come riding down the valley but Hellice Osman upon Silver Star's white horse. She was followed by Old Kit, Arkansaw and Silver Star, the first carrying a quarter of a deer slain by the Boy Knight.

In a moment Hellice and Elwe were in each other's arms, laughing and weeping for joy.

Sparrowhawk advanced and taking Silver Star's hand, said:

"Silver Star, you have proven yourself a brave and noble boy; and yet the time has been when I would gladly have taken your life. It was because you were a mortal terror to me. I knew you were constantly on the hunt for the hiding-place of Paul Osman, the Outlaw; and I am Paul Osman, but I—"

"Kit told me all, Sparrowhawk; but can you blame me, innocent as you are?"

"I cannot, Silver Star."

"It will make us all the better friends for having been enemies by mistake to each other."

"Yes, life-long friends." And the two shook hands.

Breakfast was soon over with, and then the little party took their departure for the fort. They knew not what moment the Blackfeet and outlaws would be upon them. But, thanks to an overruling Providence, they were all permitted to reach the fort in safety after three days and nights of toil and vigilance—after months and years of heart-burnings and fear amid the wilds of the Great West.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE REWARD.

WE will not attempt to follow the fortunes of our characters after leaving the fort and seeking their respective homes far and near, for there was little that happened that would interest the reader.

We will pass over a period of five years and take the reader into the beautiful valley of the Niobrara river. About a hundred miles from the Missouri a number of farms and cattle ranches broke the dreary monotony of the valley, and nestled in among the green cottonwoods were the pleasant,

happy homes of the pioneer families. There was a lavish display of wealth and refinement about a little snow-white cottage that stood near the dim road along which strangers seldom passed. Honey-suckle and wild-cucumbers vines were trained over the doors and windows in magnificent wreaths. The door was approached through a long arbor of cypress and morning-glories; and flowers of every kind and hue lent their perfume to the beauties of that little paradise.

Two weary-looking horsemen traveling westward called at this cottage, and hitching their horses at the gate advanced to the door and asked for a cup of water. They were both rather old men, travel-worn and dusty.

A pretty little woman with a baby in her arms, and a smile upon her bright, happy face, brought them some water in a polished tin cup, and as she handed it to one of them, she looked him straight in the eyes and uttered a scream.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the other man, "Kit, you've skeered her to death."

"Holy horn of Joshua!" exclaimed the astonished old traveler, "Arkie, that's one of the girls."

Dropping her baby, the woman, with tears of joy in her eyes, rushed forward and throwing her arms about the neck of one, then the other of the dusty, worn travelers, kissed each with joy, while her face glowed with a radiant love.

"Arkie!" cried Kit Bandy, glancing from the cradle to the glowing face of the beautiful young mother, "don't you know her? Look, comrade, don't you know her?"

Arkansaw rubbed his eyes and looked at the woman then at Kit and exclaimed:

"It is Hellice—Hellice Osman. Bless God! give me just another shake of your hand, child."

And the two old men stood over the little woman and the baby and talked like children with their eyes full of moisture and their hearts throbbing wildly.

"Why, we never dreamed of meetin' you, Hellice," said Arkansaw; "we s'posed we'd never see you again after you left the fort that time. Oh, Moses! it don't seem possible!"

"Is that your baby, Hellice?" asked Old Kit.

"Yes, sir," replied Hellice, a light of joy beaming in her eyes.

"Well, well, such is life. Arkie, it seems as though the glories of this world has been denied us," sighed Old Kit.

"The Lord's will be done, Kit," replied Arkansaw.

"Kit," said Hellice, "you and Arkansaw look tired. You must stop with us—you shall go no further this day. I know Frank will be rejoiced to see you. He speaks of you every day of his life."

"Who's Frank, Hellice?" asked Old Kit, seating himself and removing his cap.

"Frank Clayton—my husband."

Kit and Arkansaw both shook their heads and said:

"Don't know him."

"Why, yes, you do," laughed Hellice; "he is Silver Star!"

"Ah! we might 'a' known that much, Arkie. You know I told you five years ago—well, it don't make any difference, after all. Come here, you little Silver Star, till I eat you up for your father's sake," and Kit took the baby up as if it had been a bubble liable to vanish in an instant.

"And Sparrowhawk," continued Hellice, "and Elwe are married, and living just down the road away."

"Blessed news!" shouted Kit. "Why, Arkansaw, this is a taste of glory—to meet these young folks. And Elwe married Sparrowhawk? Well, well, I'd 'a' swore once that she and Silver Star'd marry. But laws! you can't tell anything 'bout love. It dips around like the needle of the compass before it settles. But where is Silver Star, Hellice?"

"Back in the field. I will call him."

She took a tin horn from a shelf, and going to the door blew two or three sharp blasts upon it.

A few minutes later a man with a long beard, and a tall manly figure came galloping up to the door upon a white horse.

"Ah, blessed if there ain't that same white horse, old Prince; but the one on it's not the boy we knew," said Kit, as he saw the man approaching.

Silver Star came in. He knew the old men at sight, and then and there occurred a joyful meeting.

"I am rejoiced to meet you, my dear, beloved old friends," said Silver Star; "I have heard of you but once in three years, and came to the conclusion that you had disappeared from the scene of action. Where have you been, and where are you bound for?"

"We've been down in Texas and Kansas straightening out some kinks; and now we are on our way to the upper Missouri to work up another case not unlike that of Elwe's."

"Why, my friends, you are getting too old for such hardships," Silver Star declared.

"No, we love it; and we expect to die in the cause."

"Well, at any rate, you must stay a week with us—a month—a year, for that matter."

"We'll stay awhile with you, Silver Star, to rest and recruit up in your little paradise," said Kit. "Oh, if I could have such a home and all its pleasures, seems to me I'd be content to settle down. But, why murmur? I have chosen my lot, and although it is wild and adventuresome, I love it. It affords me pleasure to make others happy. As for the future, let me exclaim with the poet:

"Ah, me! for us all some sweet hope lies
Deeply buried from human eyes."

THE END.

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